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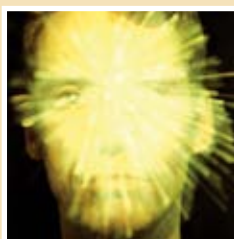
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'To me, songwriting
is incidental to
making music'

– Robert Wyatt, p44

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Cover photography: Cat Stevens

I'd forgotten festivals could be this much fun.

It's been about seven years since I last went to one in the UK (one day at an excellent ATP aside): I associated them with bad food and drunkenness, belligerent punters and the odd snatch of music caught floundering in the wind. Corporate events that had little or nothing to do with how I wanted to experience my music: during the Nineties I'd stay in hotels, get wasted and listen to stories about my behaviour for years afterwards (ambulances, wig-wearing, wheelchair-pushing, fights included).

So yeah: some friends mentioned they'd gone to **End Of The Road** last year and loved it: refined, family-conscious, smaller, good food – and with the sort of camping space that meant you didn't have to worry about drunk Macc Lads fans. Even more crucially, while *Plan B* were putting together the programme for the festival, I met the organisers Sofia and Simon several times and was impressed by their enthusiasm and obvious love for music; also their musical tastes seemed to coincide brilliantly with mine in many places: Pete And The Pirates, Misty's Big Adventure, Scout Niblett, Howe Gelb, Euros Childs, Jeffrey Lewis... So I decided to take the leap: indeed, I even took along my tent (for the first time at a festival) so I could fully immerse myself.

And it was so much fun. Meeting so many lovely people who – wonder of wonders – wanted to meet me as well; cajoling a drunk Frida Hyvönen to play a set on the piano in the Secret Garden (see below), Saturday evening; catching the astonishing David Thomas Broughton perform his multi-layered, gospel-intensity music while zippering up his cardigan (Scout Niblett, standing next to me, was in hysterics at his behaviour); rushing from the Garden Stage while watching Herman Düne perform their customary magic to watch enraptured at The Wave Pictures in The Local tent; dancing with bruised feet to Misty's Big Adventure; drinking chai tea after awesome chai tea with the Light People in the Healing Field; performing four impromptu sets myself (in the Secret Garden, and at The Local – the latter two a cappella and with startlingly

appreciative audiences); swaying enraptured once more to The Concretes (even if they were bereft of brass); charmed by the sweet gawky girl-folk of Peggy Sue And The Pirates; wandering through the fairy lights after my set to discover David-Ivar Herman Düne weaving enchantment on mandolin alongside Turner Cody...

And the food was incredible, too! The disappointment I felt from being unable to DJ on the Sunday evening, as promised in the programme – I had to return to look after my son, Isaac – soon faded. But many apologies to anyone who showed up expecting a little *Plan B* to round off the festival...

So...any chance of a *Plan B* evening, or tent, or something at the next End Of The Road, folks?

Everett True

So the summer festival season is over, leaving behind it two editors who don't usually like outdoor festivals much actually quite into them now, thanks. The boutique approach – small, well-chosen lineups, attractive settings, tasty bourgeois food, no big corporate logos – is clearly one that works for us, un-rockin' as that sounds. I had a great time at **Green Man**, which veered rather nicely between rustic charm and vintage free-fest debauchery.

Now it's time to move indoors for a few months, and *Plan B* continues to get involved in happenings around the country as both media partner and enthusiastic attendee. As you read about it in our film section, the **Raindance Festival** will be well underway, showcasing new, independent films from around the world. The documentaries are always pretty strong, and this year I'll be looking out for a profile of *Plan B* cover star David Berman, of Silver Jews fame, and *This Is Nollywood* – a doc about the booming Nigerian film industry.

We're also pleased to be media partner for **Only Connect**, which takes place at London's Barbican and boasts the first London performance of Philip Glass' 'Music In 12 Parts' in over 10 years. There's also the chance to hear Glass' new settings of Leonard Cohen's poetry, and to see the composer perform with Patti Smith. Heavyweights all.

From concert hall to DIY show, and we're equally excited about the **Swn** festival in Cardiff, which brings together local labels, promoters and bands and basically has a good, loud party, as evinced by our Swn-flavoured covermount CD. The lineup's got everything from dubstep to antifolk, and I think ET's even doing one of his infamous, epic DJ slots – and these, I have to say, are always a winner.

Frances Morgan

Photography: Andrew Chapman



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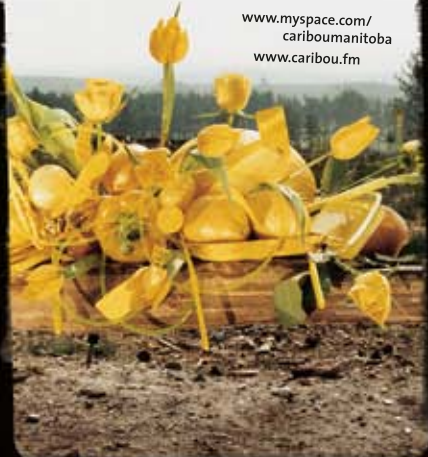
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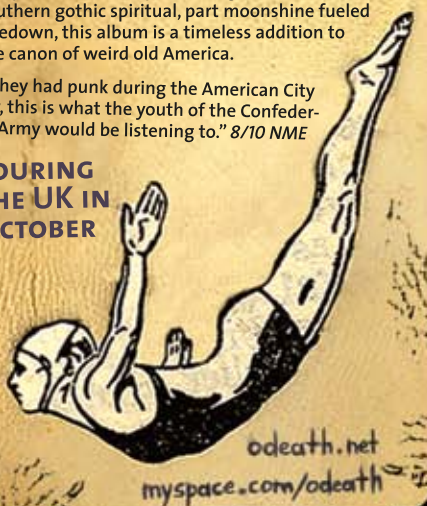
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TOURING THE UK IN OCTOBER



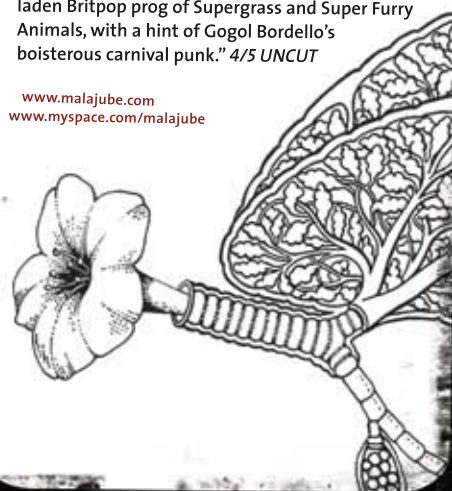
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the sound of swn

Words: Huw Stephens

Plan B is proud to present a selection of the fine folks making waves at the first ever **Swn Festival**, which kicks off in numerous venues around Cardiff on 9, 10 and 11 November. Swn invites labels to curate nights and local promoters to put on gigs, with art and films also on show around the city. **Huw Stephens**, Radio One DJ and the man behind the festivities, talks us through the sound of Swn



The Cribbs

The Cribbs Be Safe

The brothers Jarman unite with Lee Ranaldo from Sonic Youth on this essential track from their third album, *Men's Needs, Women's Needs, Whatever*. They continue to prove they're one of the best bands in the world, with blistering live shows, unstoppable touring and underground anthems. www.myspace.com/thecribbs Cardiff University, Nov 9

Spencer McGarry Season The Unfilmable Life And Life Of...

The new Businessman label provides a platform for Spencer and his gang of merry men. With plans for six genre-spanning albums, first catch his hyper-pop live and look out for future releases on Businessman – so that, to quote the label, "We can all move forward in a way that can see us working smarter, not harder, in a modern, solution-oriented, dynamic environment". www.myspace.com/spencermcgarry Tommy's Bar, Nov 9

The Gentle Good Waiting For Jane

Recent celebrations of older Welsh folksters have also thrown the spotlight on new names, including The Gentle Good, who is one Gareth Bonello. A hit at The Green Man, his songs in Welsh and Spanish are always a pleasure to hear live, with a simplicity and rivalled beauty throughout by his records. www.myspace.com/gentlegood Cafe Europa, Nov 9

Truckers Of Husk Last One

These experimental math-rockers formed, disbanded, reformed and are now spoken of in reverential terms in south Wales. Hear this (and catch them at Swn) to see why.

They've recently supported fellow complexity fans Battles – now they play Swn with Future Of The Left. Win-win! www.myspace.com/truckersofhusk Clwb Ifor Bach, Nov 9

George Pringle Fellini For Prime Minister

The spoken-word queen of now (and the future?) brings her poetic licence to Swn, between gigging and fluttering in and out of Oxford and London. Influences like Kraftwerk, Cat Power, The Knife and The Kills combine to create something rather special – when she played the Latitude festival, the sun came out. www.myspace.com/georgepringle Barfly, Nov 10

The Hot Puppies Clarinet Town

About to release their second album proper following a collection of ace rarities, The Hot Puppies, led by Becky Newman, have elegance, swooning pop and tunes down to a tee – as testified here on a new track, as yet unreleased. Straight out of space, wearing a nice bit of jewellery. www.thehotpuppies.com Chapter Arts Centre Nov 10

Eugene McGuinness Vela

We were literally *this* close to the term 'popular singer-songwriter' being frowned upon, when Eugene McGuinness came along. His first demos reminded me of Devendra, his recent songs are all him, and live he's a wonder to watch. Playing with Lightspeed Champion and Emmy The Great, on tour with The Mules and Tunng, he plays the Domino night at Swn. www.myspace.com/eugenemcguinness85 Barfly, Nov 9

Texas Radio Band Bea

You got to smile at Texas Radio Band's tunes, and I'm of the opinion that lead singer Mini is a genius. They've released records on Rasp, Boobytrap, Slacry, Bee and Smoke and now My Kung Fu are putting out their album, titled *Gavin*. Shufflin' pop, deceiving brilliance. www.texasradioband.co.uk Clwb Ifor Bach, Nov 9

Gindringer El-Ton

It's The Fall, it's Datblygu, it's Whitehouse. It's all of this and none of this too. They supported SFA. They sing of Fray Bentos pies and darts players, and there's a one off single on Businessman Records coming out in January. Go to their Myspace and listen to 'Greengrocer'. *Go on*. They play with Charlottefield and DJ Scotch Egg at Swn. www.myspace.com/gindringer Buffalo Bar, Nov 9

Those Dancing Days 1000 Words

Playing the Wichita night with labelmates The Cribbs and Brighton's Shrag, yet another Swedish must-hear record arrives, this time with enough joy, pop and non-irritating synth to make you smile till xmas. Stockholm wins again! www.myspace.com/thosedancingdays Cardiff University, Nov 9

Cate Le Bon Mas Mas

Quietly digging her route via appearances on Finders Keepers albums and nights, leaving the farm for a wider audience was an obvious choice for Le Bon, as is releasing her own records. Being raised by wolves in West Wales left its mark, but fortunately her howling is of the most pleasing nature.

www.catelebon.com
Venue and date tbc

Bass Clef One Hundred Point Three

I got to meet Bass Clef at a Beirut gig, which is good because both are playing the first Swn. It's moody, twisted, simply thrilling dubstep that's been welcomed with open arms and ears on previous 12-inches, with more to come soon on the Blank Tapes label. www.blanktapes.org Clwb Ifor Bach, Nov 9

The Victorian English Gentlemens Club Ban The Gin

Yes, it's the best song about gin ever, by the weirdest-named band ever... and they're playing Swn just round the corner from their house which they share with a naked man for a table. Find them on the ever-reliable Fantastic Plastic label. www.thevictorianenglishgentlemensclub.co.uk Cardiff University, Nov 9

The School Let It Slip

It's Liz from The Loves' new band, and it's all shimmery summertime pop coming out on Elephant Records. Liz also puts on the Loose nights in Cardiff and is putting on a Saturday extravaganza at Tommy's bar with both The Loves and The School playing. Happy days. www.myspace.com/theschoolband Tommy's Bar, Nov 10

Two Gallants The Hand That Held Me

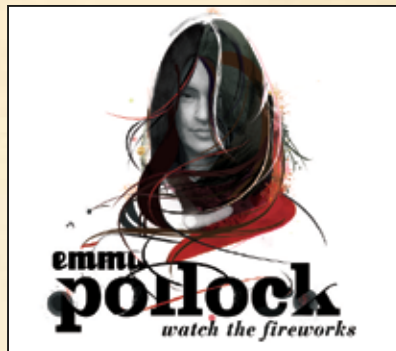
Their recent mini-album *The Scenery Of Farewell* is every bit as great as could be expected from the San Francisco duo. www.twogallants.com Venue tbc, Nov 11

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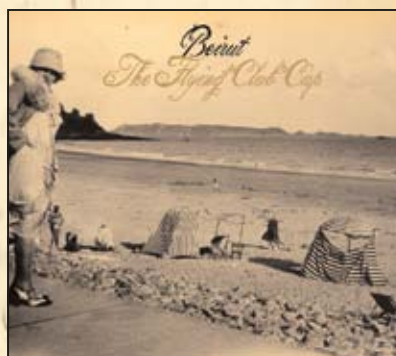
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8th October

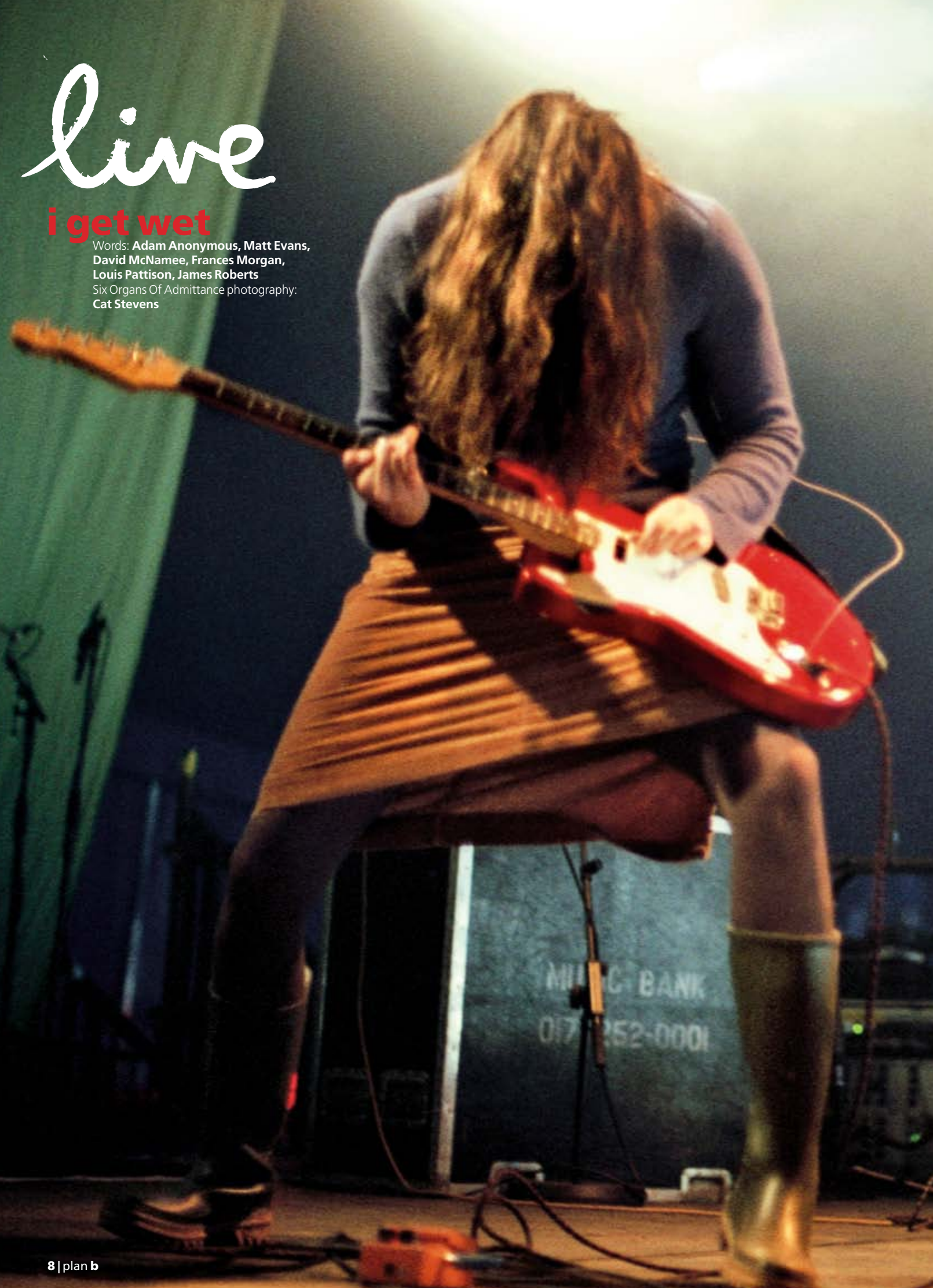
CELEBRATION
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live

i get wet

Words: Adam Anonymous, Matt Evans,
David McNamee, Frances Morgan,
Louis Pattison, James Roberts
Six Organs Of Admittance photography:
Cat Stevens



Green Man Festival
Glanusk Park, Brecon Beacons

Battles

Battles stick out at Green Man like superheroes in a field of slippers-clad househusbands. OK, visually, aside from respective explosions from multi-instrumentalist/part-time vocalist Tyondai Braxton (hair) and John Stanier (astonishing high cymbal drum wizardry), that analogy is stretched. But as the foursome peel out their greatest moments to date – not *Mirrored*, latecomers; instead structurally spotless early EP highlights – kids you could never imagine getting rocks off to previous pursuits Don Caballero or Helmet begin (new) raving like it's the last party on earth. The Battles 'hit', 'Atlas' is cranked up to religious fervour levels, Braxton pulling energy from his audience with shamanic intensity. Suddenly post-rock possesses an additional 'post' prefix, plus a massive Class As grin. (AA)

Bill Callahan

They still make a ponderously incorrect pairing. Callahan is like the anti-Newsom, or maybe just like antimatter in her career-supernova. A friend argues with me that Newsom is a 'philologist', that she trusts language even to the extent of letting it show her what to do next with the narrative. That her songs sway this way or that on just the taste of a word in her mouth. "That's porn to me," friend adds. By contrast I wonder if I love Smog then – even post-pseudonym, he seems to ever further crouch into the amorphous gauze of that word's associations – almost precisely because of his ferocious *mistrust* of language. His words don't swirl, effortlessly and pointlessly. They're small, precise studs like bullets or punctuation, pushed up through a voice that's just flat-out gorgeous. Even as his new songs become ever more proud and handsome, you can't help but dwell savagely on fallout and how these words would taste if his heart broke. Which is cruel, because Bill looks so...happy? Here. He's the most male person I can think of. I want him to seep into me; and smash him with kisses. (DMc)

Directing Hand

Spend less than four minutes at Green Man and you'll realise it's all about the toddler-friendly, warm, fuzzy folk and melodic indiepop vibes. So thank Baphomet for Directing Hand. The latest incarnation of free range drummer Alex Neilson's unbound improv-folk project sees him teaming up with vocalist/harpist Vinnie Blackwall to explore sinister and wide-open new pastures. Playing under an incongruous circus-vivid marquee, her unshackled screams, and operatic moans, driven by Neilson's volatile scattershot drumming, have an unsettling atavistic power that's several thousand miles distant from anything else at the festival – except possibly the chilling guitar abuse of Six Organs' Elisa Ambrogio. Drawing loosely on folk traditions, Directing Hand's presence at Green Man may make vague sense, but their writhing energy makes them a welcome touch of primal chaos magick in a weekend otherwise defined by gourmet food, cloudy cider and gentle bonhomie. (ME)

Stephen Malkmus And The Jicks

Ah, Stephen Malkmus, you handsome bastard – you and your Jicks, all half cut in the Welsh countryside on a Sunday night. This should be the ideal time to rekindle our idol-worship – audience with nowhere else to go, battered down by a weekend of hippies and rain,

pushchairs and Robert Plant. But it's doesn't go quite that smoothly. Pavement's louche talisman hacks at his Jag with occasionally excellent effect, lurching between plodding, overlong efforts to snippets of stuttering brilliance – 'Baltimore', or set closer 'Baby C'mon' – and let's give special note to Sleater-Kinney's Janet Weiss on drums. But much of the entertainment here comes from Malkmus' drunken banter, relating the trials of the recent V Festival – "We endorse The Cribs, but not Kasabian" – and rambling on about his '1987' shirt and the "wild times" said garment lived through. Steve, we love you, your hair, your Jag, your songs (some). But you Jicks sometimes have your good times at our expense. (JR)

Six Organs Of Admittance

Last time I caught Six Organs Of Admittance, Ben Chasny cut a lonely sort of figure, wrapped up deep in his own baroque folk universe, apparently impervious to the chatter of an audience killing time before Joanna Newsom's harp revue. Tonight, though, would seem to confirm that love can do funny things to a man. Six Organs are now two, Chasny joined onstage by his girlfriend, Elisa Ambrogio of Magik Markers, for a set of distressed electric blues that sees ideas, riffs and motifs reflected from fretboard to fretboard. Ambrogio comes on like the girl from *The Ring* on a camping holiday, hair pouring over her eyes like a waterfall, Wellington-clad legs set broad akimbo with a brash, surely sexual intent. And the way her and Chasny appear onstage,

Hair pours over her eyes like a waterfall, Wellington-clad legs set broad akimbo

it almost feels wrong to watch, guitars thrust at one another's crotch, heads moving close and lips almost meeting. That Chasny breaks off the love-in only for a solo cover of Coil's 'Fire Of The Mind' only confirms that in 2007, Six Organs is all about the sex magic. (LP)

Strange Attractor

Saturday evening and I'm holed up in the cinema tent. Not only is it warm and dry, but London-based esoteric journal *Strange Attractor* is to commandeer the space for the night with films (including Bill Morrison's *Decasia*, constructed from decaying film fragments), talks and psychedelic sounds from editor Mark Pilkington's band Raagnagrok, to which I've been asked to contribute, er, 'ululations'. Raagnagrok, usually a duo of Pilkington on synths and guitarist Zali Krishna, perform tonight with additional melodica, hammer dulcimer, electronics, my ululating alter ego and bagpipes courtesy of Andy Letcher, who'll precede the music with a lecture based on his book, *Shroom: A Cultural History Of The Magic Mushroom*. His lively talk is bookended by Graham Harvey on animism and Stephen Grasso on ancestor worship, by which time Krishna, sporting white suit and electric sitar, is summoning us to the stage. Kneeling, barefoot, I hear my voice echo around the pitch-dark tent, as our tentative space ritual builds into a cloud bank of drone and flutter. I can't see the kind of people who're missing Battles and Robert Plant to be here instead, but I salute them all, the freaks. (FM)

the void



cutting pink with knives

Words: **Melissa Bradshaw**

Photography: **Kat Green**

Cutting Pink With Knives are Edi Frankel (synths, guitar, vocals, modernist architecture and "temping is crap"), Alex Fitzpatrick (bass, label boss, generally quite sensible) and Chris (vocals, joker). Their second album, *Populuxe*, is a chimera grafted from the skins of screamo, pop, Saints and Eighties electro.

They used to have a bassist called Dan but he left to become a full-time nurse. "And he was a total bastard. He had a habit of laughing at people who were near death!" says Chris.

Edi: "Imagine you'd broken your ankle, and you were like, 'Help me, I need a nurse!', you'd go to your friend Dan...and he'd poke it."

Chris: "At one of our shows a kid had a seizure, and he couldn't stop laughing. 'At one of our shows a kid had a seizure...' – oh, put that in! We went to help out and..."

Edi: "He was getting stoned with An Albatross..."

Chris: "He's a bastard."

Alex runs Holy Roar, the label to which Rolo Tomassi belong. It comes from the name of a song by stoner band Torche (which came from him and his girlfriend ransacking his record collection trying to find a good name). He interviewed Cutting Pink With Knives for an extreme metal magazine, with the intention of asking them if he could put out their album, but they were already signed to Adadaat. He never told them that till our interview. They were touched. Chris said he was gonna cry.

Theirs was initially a hardcore template of short, short songs, punchy riffs and surprise conjunctures. Their extended sophomore eclecticism is due to Alex, who will listen to anything (he mentions Billie Piper). Chris has an extensive hip hop collection; Edi is from a classical background. Partly, one would assume, due to their shared hardcore roots, and more immediately because Edi doesn't have

'We are not the stupid po-faced hardcore music of today'

ADD but won't play a good riff more than four times because he gets bored of it, the longest track on *Populuxe* is 2.19 minutes ('Cosmic Explosion Of The Velvets'). It is not a matter of attention, Edi says, but patience, and it fits in with liking classical music because he only likes really fast or really slow classical music. But they wouldn't say they were a hardcore band. "We are not," Edi attests, "the stupid po-faced hardcore music of today."

Which might seem contradictory for a band that has a song about German-born modernist architect Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe ('Universal Models'), other songs called 'St Mark' and 'St Lazare' and 'All Our Oldest Spirit Fathers', and obscure scientific and sci-fi references. 'Idic' ('Edi's fault', apparently), is a reference to *Star Trek*, "somewhere in Series Two", where Spock has a necklace that represents (to Vulcans) Infinite Dimensions in Infinite Combinations.

"It's this beautiful theory of accepting everything, being open, and bringing everything into one harmonious whole," he says. Chris says that pretty much sums up the band.

They have fun with ideas and swerve on cute melodies around emo clichés. They sing songs about robots falling in love and challenge your structural precepts. But Cutting Pink With Knives aren't sure they are highbrow.

They certainly don't sound it. If you tell them they don't fit with the current stereotype of hardcore, they will shout "Bad Brains! PMA!" and emphasise the explorative fun of Antioch Arrow, An Albatross and Daughters.

"The definable moment of 'fuck you' in my life," says Chris, "but also the time when I was first really really happy, was when I first bought Minor Threat."

Populuxe was originally going to be a concept album. Edi: "It was a really sweet story about St Lazare and St Mark – there was all this strife and they had a big massive fight, and one of them grew a hydrocephalic head because it was filled with water from arrogance. And the only way he could bring people back together – because he realised there was no point in being angry..."

Chris: "But the argument was because of the dead girl that they found..."

Edi: "So they released this Golden Bison that made everything good again."

Chris: "And where did they release the Bison?"

Edi: "At the festival of High Five!!! In High Five heaven!"

Chris: "Oh my god, what is this? We sound like a youth group! We're in Peckham Community Centre!"

www.myspace.com/cuttingpinkwithknives

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Enon



don't look back

If you could freeze and relive one phase of your 'performing career' so far, what would it be?

"Maybe the first time an audience member sang along to lyrics that I had written. It was unnerving, because it meant that someone had got a tiny bit inside my head, but also thrilling because it reminded me why I wanted to do this stupid band thing in the first place."

(Iain, Bearsuit)

"Sorry! Not too good at favouring moments, other moments get jealous and then I feel all guilty... Best to just romance a new moment in secret and then leave it immediately for a whole new moment."

(John, Enon)

What were you most interested in before music, and do echoes still resonate?

"I wanted to be an architect. I could say that now, instead, I 'construct' songs, or I 'engineer' melody, but that would make me a ponce."

(Iain, Bearsuit)

"I used to be a kids' TV presenter and I wanted to be the best-known artist for painting dogs. I'm not sure if any of that still resonates – but someone asked us if we were a kids' TV tribute band at our last London gig."

(Lisa, Bearsuit)

"I wanted to be a scientist or a postman. I'm rubbish at getting out of bed, so science won out."

(Matt, Bearsuit)

"I've always been intrigued by sounds – the order and randomness of surrounding sounds and their echoes. A wise man said where there are no carpets or furniture there will be a place where echoes will resonate. For myself? Yes! Echoes still resonate. Totally. I hate carpet."

(John, Enon)

read only

The book that changed yr life (and why)?

"The writings of Cuban revolutionary Jose Martí. His philosophies were so profound and inspiring. His poetry was beautiful. I'm reading a book of Catalan poetry right now... I read everything from hand-me-down books friends give me to parenting handbooks."

(Prefuse 73)

"*The Drummer's Path* by Sule Greg Wilson. It hippped me to ancient physical secrets of rhythm and turned me around for the better."

(Matt, Enon)

Do you have a favourite lyricist (and why)?

"Hip hop? Ghostface, due to his ability to convey the craziest topic and make it sound like no one else. Other music? Jose Gonzalez – his simplicity and tone."

(Prefuse 73)

"Actually, I really like Iain's lyrics. Usually he won't tell us what they are. It's fun wondering what's going on inside his little head..."

(Cerian, Bearsuit)



Yelle

Words: **kicking_k**

Illustration: **Pellet**

France's premier musical export of the Noughties has unquestionably been its latest generation of dance music mavericks on bold new labels like Ed Banger, Institutbes, and Arcade Mode. Paris is burning, lit from within by fluo-sporting kids combining music and chemical homework to experience all the art movements at once – at parties in basements, boats and private apartments.

I momentarily experience the epoch-defining thrill of a *Smash Hits* journalist

It's a scene based around the whims and obsessions of composers and crews, rather than performers or ideologies – so one of the first faces to focus the media's attention was Uffie and her wholly lascivious raps, soon primed to take the latest place in a proud procession of chanteuses and yé-yé girls.

The only continuity error here was that Uffie didn't sound French. She sounded American. Because she was, born in Florida – and so, naturally, with a vocal style somewhat closer to Lil' Kim than Françoise Hardy. So where was the *fille* who was going to join the dots between the fluo sound and a proud history of sophisti-pop?

"I live in Brittany and for the moment it's really cool like that," types Yelle in a snatched moment during the launch day for her debut album, *Pop-Up*. "I love Paris but feel oppressed when I stay there

more than three days... I live in a house close to the sea with a garden.

"I grew up in a family of musicians and when I was a kid I used to listen a lot of rock, pop, classical music and French songs. I discovered Daft Punk with my brother. That was my first meeting with electro."

Legend has it that she next met producer and confidante Grand Marnier at a party over a plate of marshmallows: "He introduced me to the Beastie Boys and American rap."

She came to prominence with a now-infamous diss record against TTC rapper Cuizinier, when she felt one of his lyrics had lingered too long in misogynistic posturing. And if she has no current plans for similar action, one gets the impression it's 'cause she's having too good a time to sustain hate for three minutes (actually, it's a pretty playful mauling, but a welcome one-woman backlash).

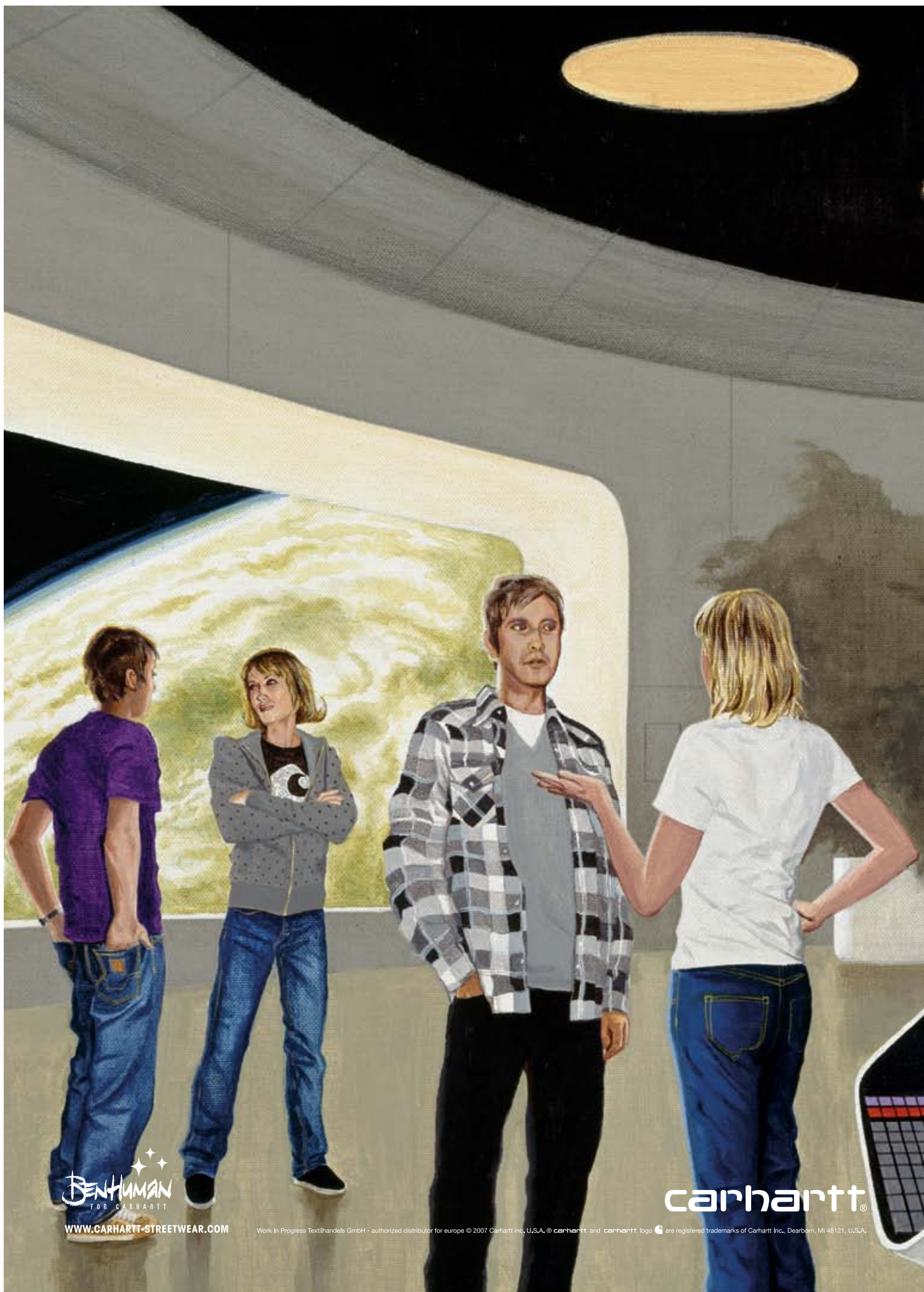
Pop-Up makes me think of well-designed (miniaturised, chromed) gadgets – slower *chansons* and Eighties pop alike rebuilt as muscle cars – low-riding hip hop backing tracks given a pash of scent and opaque synth panels like hyperreal decals. Tiny melodies interweave like a miraculous zero-g Tetris session and her voice zips around the high registers.

I ask her which previous divas she's inspired by, but she deflects it, saying, "Lots of people compare me to Lio." It's an unexpected reference – Lio being a healthsomely, um, 'ripe'-looking Eighties Lolita loaded with cutesified euphemism, playing innocence against knowing signifiers as so many Gainbourgian muses before her.

Thankfully, Yelle sidesteps the affected girlishness for a strident fash mag urbanity – although she's still able to channel an endearing silliness – her latest video seeing her bop about with lifesize camera, hairdryer and mobile phone. When I ask her which of her possessions she would *actually* like to giganticise, she says, "My bag – because it's always full of stuff and heavy – it could be walking by me," and I momentarily experience the epoch-defining thrill of a *Smash Hits* journalist.

Everyone's a winner, except the haters (always).

www.myspace.com/iloveyelle

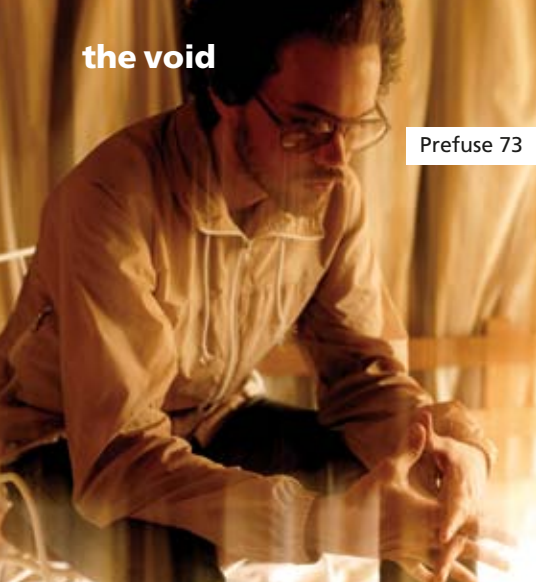


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my first band

What was yr first band? Name and musical style? Line-up and age?

"My first band was called Accustat. We were a wannabe shoegaze band but didn't sound like one – we played way too hard. I had nothing to do with the concept – I listened to hip hop mostly. I was about 18. I played anyway. People liked it but I quit because I had to work too much and wanted to have my own band, so I started making beats on a sampler and released my first record solo – it was a split with one of the drummers of Tortoise and their sound man Casey Rice."

(Prefuse 73)

"This is my first band. I'm not making new friends again, it's hard."

(Iain, Bearsuit)

"We kinda decided to lean to play so we could start up Bearsuit. Me, Iain and Jan bought cheap guitars in Argos."

(Lisa, Bearsuit)

"Unless you count being in the school brass band, then this is the first. Mind you, I've gone full circle as we're dressing up in brass band outfits at the moment."

(Jan, Bearsuit)

"When we were about 13, me and my friend Claire Bennett were in a theoretical band based on a shared admiration for The Smiths and not being *understood*, but only until we realised neither of us could actually play any instruments – similar to early Bearsuit! When I was at junior school we wrote a recycling rap and performed it in assembly. It's a pity I didn't know Lisa then cos she was junior beatbox champion for the south east..."

(Cerian, Bearsuit)

"Sunken Giraffe. It was sort of a hardcore band with other juvenile influences. We were all 15. I've been in a few... Gary Coleman's Other Kidney, Haunting Souls, The Heart Attack and Brainiac. I suppose the link between most of the bands is kind of a punk aesthetic and a sense of humour."

(John, Enon)

What wd be yr dream side-project or collaboration?

"Ennio Morricone, Prefuse 73, Nas and MF Doom on an entire record! WHOA!"

(Prefuse 73)

"If I had time I'd really like to write some little bits of music and do animation stuff to them, but so far I lack quite a lot of the skills needed..."

(Cerian, Bearsuit)



why i love...late eighties goth

Words: Ned Raggett

Illustration: Ben Rivers

Goth, it is claimed, is never hip. Not true – it just has to not be called Goth in order to be accepted. (That's a story in, and of, itself. Heck, probably a full website.) Lord knows, meanwhile, that Goth is like all other subcultures, happily dedicated to its own muse and not really caring all that much what the outside world thinks. But somewhere in between, there's a dead spot neither side wants to admit to

If Devendra sang it, everyone would get down

entirely, that period when Goth seemed almost mainstream and acceptable, and yet wasn't – on two continents, no less. Behold the late Eighties!

Here's the secret history that's never exactly told, outside of a Mick Mercer book or two. Beggars Banquet had figured out early on (first with Gary Numan and then Bauhaus) that that they had a corner on a particular market, incipient but present. Armed with this knowledge, they proceeded to brilliantly beat it into the ground with three signings: the Southern Death Cult (eventually redacted to The Cult), Gene Loves Jezebel and Fields Of The Nephilim. Three more perfect bands could not exist, since everyone hated them but their fans – the problem being for everyone else that their fans had money, which they then spent. The fans loved it because all three bands became perfectly ridiculous

in just the right way – for instance, at the start The Fields put on cowboy hats, posed with flour, but later freaked out and turned in Pink Floyd jams fronted by a Satanic shaman, getting Radio One daytime play for their pains. That's entertainment!

The Cult and Gene Loves Jezebel had a better idea, namely figure out how to win over KROQ listeners in LA, then conquer the heavy metal KNAC crowd by indirect means. Posing, clothes, make-up, riffs... they fit into glam-metal's overlord years just so, and had English accents as well. Gene Loves Jezebel opened for New Order and Echo And The Bunnymen, both of whom *hated* the Aston twins. Unfortunately for them, all their fans were the same people thanks to classic 'they're all from London aren't they?' Stateside marketing. The Cult went on to play arenas or get close, though they never quite got the Guns N' Roses knack down.

LA's own contributions to this field were equally of the moment. Jane's Addiction *über alles*, of course – Siouxsie/Cure freaks who were/weren't Sunset Strip denizens, who partied down with LA Guns, but lit incense as needed when getting their fixes. (LA Guns went Goth later with *Hollywood Vampires*, a spectacularly entertaining failure of an album – biggest fan: Anne Rice!) Bubbling under were groups like Shadowland, all of whom wanted to be Gene Loves Jezebel despite later forming bands trying to pretend otherwise. Then there was Human Drama, whose Johnny Indovina was so perfectly over the top that you can almost literally see the pose he struck on the first album *Feel* – recorded in England, for maximum Goth cred!

All the hairlines have since receded and most of the reunions sucked. But! I could make a mix disc or three of this stuff, because in all its wonky, theatrical, outrageous we-are-decadent-pagans (or not) glory, it's perfect. It was all about big dumb ritualistic sex with big dumb hairstyles – they were just dyed black. And I'll always be happy to crank up The Fields' 'Psychonaut' just so I can hear Carl McCoy growl "LET US WITNESS THE REINCARNATION OF THE SUN!" If Devendra sang it, everyone would get down.



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in the mix: simon bookish

"I recently wrote an album full of spoken word. Here's some of my favourite tracks with talking on them."

Laurie Anderson Sharkey's Night

"Despite the lapses into Peter Gabriel snazziness. I still think she's a genius. This track has a sparkling anti-logic circularity and Bill Burroughs reads it very well indeed: *'I can see two tiny pictures of myself and there's one in each of your eyes.'*"

David Bowie It's No Game (Part 1)

"Bowie originally intended to sing the Japanese parts, but the translation didn't scan. A fortuitous accident. Hisahi Miura's violent rendition of the lyrics is the split personality of Bowie's hysterical performance. As an essay on paranoia this is unbeatably effective."

Alvin Lucier I Am Sitting In A Room

"This, for me, is the 'purest' music ever written. Lucier stammers through an explanatory text, *'...I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves'*. The result is astonishing, transcendental."

Matmos

Roses And Teeth For Ludwig Wittgenstein

"Matmos are so clever, aren't they? Drew Daniel and MC Schmidt have such beautiful ears. Listen to how perfectly and playfully chosen the speaking voices are on 'Roses And Teeth'. Bastards."

Louis Andriessen De Stijl

"As if the ghost of Bach had taken over the body of Quincy Jones; a bizarre, snarling disco fugue, with singers mechanically intoning a Dutch text about *'the perfect straight line'*. At the climax of this chaos, the orchestra grinds to a halt and a dancer talks about Piet Mondrian over a jangling upright piano. It's both cheesy and disturbing. I wish all operas were like this."

Pulp My Legendary Girlfriend

"Jarvis Cocker is really rather successful these days, so it would be silly to call him underrated, but I think his experimentalism and ambition has been overlooked. I love that the spoken vocals on this track are so submerged in the mix and the nightmarish tinny cheapness of the synthesizers. Can Jarvis do a whole album of spoken word? He'd be dead good at it."

Philip Glass Einstein On The Beach

"A lot of musicians have become very, very adept at performing the earlier pieces by Philip Glass, but if you want to hear what difficult music it really is, listen to the original recording of *Einstein*. It's thrilling, the band getting to the end of each section by the threadbare skin of their pants. The contrast between that and Lucinda Childs' strung-out recitation (*'Prematurely air-conditioned supermarket...'*) is like ice cream topped with espresso."

www.simonbookish.com



christy and emily

Words: **Everett True**

Photography: **Brian Tamborello**

"I'm Christy, Christy Edwards. 'I'm Emily Manzo..."

Christy And Emily live together in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg – they're friends with former *Careless Talk Costs Lives* cover stars Young People, and interpretative all-female ensemble Effi Briest; and they play music that switches between melodious reverberating Wurlitzer and choppy, aggressive guitar with sweetly yearning vocals that bask in

'Shopping is the anti-song!'

repetition and self-realisation; and they're right now seated in my house, bubbling, excited, polite.

A day ago, I didn't know this: I discovered most of it by chance, watching semi-disinterested in between DJ sets at a Nightingales gig, and suddenly thinking, "Wow, this is really good – the way it builds and builds; the teasing vocal interplay, that girl playing the keyboard *like she can...*" I was particularly taken with a number written that morning, dedicated and written about Nightingales.

Afterwards, I spoke to Emily; she told me the above facts and...well. They give me a copy of their Social Registry album, *Queen's Head*, and it's rather special and...well. Here we are. Talking.

"I remember the first time I practised with you," says Christy. "I hit my head on the cymbal. I was playing drums."

"We were in a band called the Wolf Fighters," clarifies Emily, "before we decided to be a duo. I was drinking whisky and offering you some Salteens. That was the first time I talked to you. I said, 'This is really nice together, whisky and Salteens.'"

"That was around 2002 or 3," says Christy.

So (I say, pointing to Emily), you're classically-trained, and you (Christy) are...why play music? Why the guitar?

"I like rock music. I played trumpet when I was a kid. And I was like, 'I can't play rock on a trumpet'."

Yeah you can!

"Now I could, but then I was into heavy metal. And I can't play metal guitar anymore at all..."

Who inspired you to play guitar?

"Um, I guess, a really early boyfriend. He played guitar and I thought it was cool. So he gave me tablature books and stuff. I would try to play but... I learnt a lot of Metallica songs but I was never very good at learning people's songs. I started writing songs straight away. I have a recording of me riffing on the guitar from high school which is pretty entertaining. It's much easier! I still feel that way."

And (I say, pointing to Emily again)...yourself?

"I've been playing piano since I was in kindergarten and...yeah! I didn't play in bands 'til I got to New York in 2001. I'm from Maine."

How did you make that leap...was it a leap?

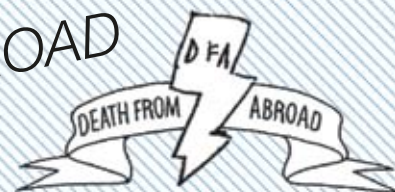
"Not really. I got into old country music and I was singing, but I didn't play keyboards on anything 'til I met the Wolf Fighters. Even though I'd been to a lot of shows I didn't know anything about amplifiers... I played my whole first Wolf Fighters gig without my amp on at all."

Why write songs, why not just go shopping?

"Shopping is the anti-song!" exclaims Christy, horrified. "It's the thing that makes me crazy. Music is one of the best art forms because it's inherently social. It's everything put into one. You get to be personal, yet there's a layer of abstraction that happens between your song's motivation and how it seems to the listener. It's fun, for us. Hopefully it's fun for you."

www.myspace.com/christyandemily

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Words: **Everett True, Frances Morgan** and **kicking_k**
Illustration: **Lady Lucy**

You're going doooown! You're going dooooooown! Like non-contact Wrestlemania with hot moves including the Ego-Breaker, Ironc Power Kiss and Eyebrow Suplex. You're all going dooooooooooown!



Jakobinarina

His Lyrics Are Disastrous (Regal)
Icelandic youth represent! Luxuriant fringes half-cover the kind of wise-ass lyrics spat out by those fortunate enough to be "17 and fucked off" the world over.

Everett: Listened to this album three times this morning already: love it. Young and stupid, but not dumb, just brash.
Frances: I have to say it's a bit slick for me. I'd like it if it were a little more ramshackle.
Everett: Like hearing The Ex played by swaggering teen punks: the "Let's rob a bank" line could well be a tribute to The Ex song 'Let's Rob A Spermbank'.
Frances: Rhythmically it's nothing like The Ex.
Kick: Very young but kind of acting like they want to be much, much older – not drinking age, but middle-aged and seen-it-all.
Frances: Yeah, cutely jaded!
Everett: It's not so much The Ex but those jokey-yet-political German punks Die Toten Hosen. Nice and short, as well. They will totally get better if they add a couple of females to their lineup, a la The Ex. THIS IS A HINT TO RECORD COMPANY.

Cadence Weapon Sharks (Big Dada)

From his album *Breaking Keyfabe*, already a critical success in Canada. The title apparently refers to the wrestling world's presentation of scripted drama as realtime struggles (and what happens when the wrestlers improvise or disobey).

Frances: It's kind of smart-ass. And annoying. I personally like it.
Kick: It might be machines, but it sounds really unregulated, fungal...
Everett: It's all in yr face: Canadians don't have a rep for that.
Frances: I like the way the vocals just cut off – or wait, is that a swearsy filter?
Everett: I'd prefer a few more spaces. Gaps.

Kick: It's so atonal and, kind of... gross, in the sense of too much, a mess. But he sounds totally at home.
Everett: That bit's like the Silcon Teens, I swear!
Kick: Really think this guy could continue to develop, have a lot to say. Multi-faceted like a Rubik's dodecahedron.

Those Dancing Days Those Dancing Days (Wichita)

A gaggle of schoolgirls from Sweden precede their forthcoming invasion of yr heart (with 'Hitten' or, 'The Hit') via a self-titled raw pop statement of intense fun (although they're still too young for nightlife). Nostalgia for short-term pleasures that haven't occurred yet, then.
Frances: I liked it until the singing happened.
Kick: I saw them playing a TV show – they were a mixture of rigid shyness and quiet self-assurance.
Everett: Yeah, what's that singing all about? Entirely wrong for the drum and keys.
Frances: It needs to be higher and clearer.
Kick: I really like her voice – she's this kid with a shock of curls and a voice which just doesn't seem to belong to her...
Frances: She should get a different one, then.
Everett: Give the band to a few souls in London, and let the singer take root with one of those gloomy Eighties post-Smiths bands.
Frances: Yeah, that would work. I like the keyboard... it's nice and fast.
Everett: Yeah, it's threatening to spill over
Frances: It won't though. They're Swedes. They don't do spillage.
Kick: Their compositions are winningly accomplished. They're gonna be pop stars.

Free Blood
EP1 (Adventures Close To Home)
The second release on this new imprint sees two of !!! meeting a ladyfriend at

a party where she is 'facilitating mayhem', turning into...

Frances: Indie dance.
Everett: Oh boy. I can smell the sweat pits of *Vice* from here...
Frances: Yeah, this is kind of complacent-sounding? I like the handclaps, tho'.
Everett: Like having your face shoved in an undulating armpit.
Kick: Been a while since !!! have grabbed hold of me any place uncomfortable, but this wrongs me right.
Frances: It's got more bottom-end fun than !!! have had in a while.
Kick: There's enough dissonance and tangles and twists to stop it descending into one boring groooooove.
Everett: WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE? Are there any shocks of curls?
Frances: I think so. In the armpits.
Kick: Like, y'know the way jam bands tend to just get more-and-more obvious...? I don't think these guys do that. And I pat them on the head for it.
Frances: The breakdowns are super contrived. I think it should just stay at a high level of excitement all the way through.

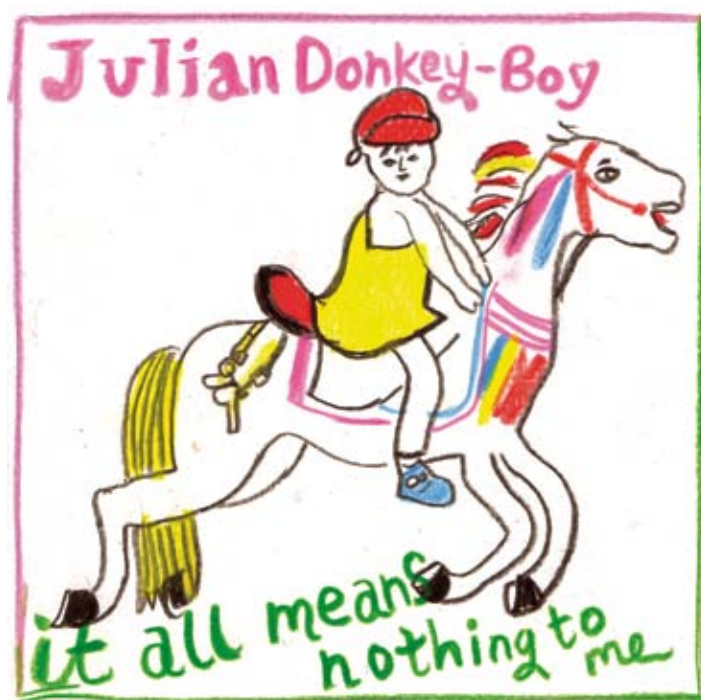
Million Dan
Mic Chek (Million Dappa)
His MySpace player is broken, and black-on-black text means we just accidentally blocked him, but still, when you're "on a mission to save UK hip hop" sometimes details get lost.

Kick: Um, save it from itself...? It's hardly threatened from outside – is it?
Everett: BISCUIT BREAK!
Frances: I like the chorus, the "rip it up!" bit with the girls shouting.
Everett: Yeah, I'm digging on it, like sweet potatoes.
Frances: I get a slightly pompous feel off a lot of UK hip hop. Like it's really SERIOUS. And

deeeeep. Musically, I mean. Like strings and stuff. But this is just a great party tune.
Kick: Apart from grime, most of the UK hip hop I actually don't hate riffs heavy on Jamaican roots...
Everett: I like the ragga feel, too.
Everett: I'd dance to this. But with my ass. Not my mind. And certainly not my feet.

These New Puritans Numbers (Angular)

Young conceptualists from Southend salute "medieval magic realism, text, circles, ice, compression, now..." as they advance in a modified arrow formation, four abreast. Share an aggressively minimal slant with Prinzhorn Dance School, for example.
Frances: They're very young, but they're aiming right from the start to be conceptual. Which was always my aim when I was young. So I can kind of relate to it.
Kick: They're aggressively smart. And, OK, maybe not as smart as they think they are – but that's the best place to start.
Everett: Isn't it considered somewhat gauche to name yrself after a Fall song?
Frances: Like the artist Martin Creed, he used to have a band called Owada which was all about numbers. The bands I was in years ago, we were all about that kind of thing. Doing songs about getting rid of songs.
Everett: "Every number has a meaning"? OK. That's like writing an alphabet primer. Maybe I'll play this to my son, to help him learn.
Kick: It would be better if all the lyrics were numbers, and you needed to join their fan club to find out what the lyrics mean.
Frances: They're trying – very clumsily and naively – to get away from the stuff most people write songs about.
Everett: Hmm.
Frances: Which is FINE when you are 19! Come on! It's better than being emo.



They love cats! We love cats! Let's have their children!

Everett: Is that why they're singing in that Franz Ferdinand kinda style?

Frances: Someone's kind of produced them too much...

Daedelus

Fair Weather Friends (Big Dada)

A new EP takes Victorian soundalike Alfred Darlington's direction toward Euro parties "who want dance music at the top of their night", sprawling between garage re-fixes and four/four rockism. File under: everything.

Frances: I loved Daedelus' last album, shimmery psychedelic sounds and all.

Kick: Sounds like an advert for a song at the moment. Real song coming soon – keep hitting refresh...

Frances: Yeah, it's a bit vague. But summery. He's good at echoey percussive boingy stuff.

Everett: This is not baroque. It's kinda like something on Spanish é-l-loving label Siesta, mixed by a proper dance head... the vague voiceover, the synth handclaps.

Kick: Like The Go! Team, but emphasising all the textural parts they bury...?

Frances: Yeah, it needs more... something. I like it though. It reminds me of Isolée. That vaguely sad-sounding synth and nostalgic, swimmy echo...

Kick: It's profoundly OK.

Nathan Fake

You Are Here (Border Community)

The latest single from the electro-ruralist sapling's debut album is accompanied by an utterly huggable video, in which our hero embarks on a bird-watching mission in a lysergic cartoon paradise.

Kick: A cold day, a warm car, there's rain on the horizon...

Frances: ...or some bloopy suburban boy bedroom music... His debut album came out last year and had some beautiful stuff on it.

And some pretty dull stuff too. I know he's very 'indie' but I'd rather not hear that reflected in the rhythm... it's fanned out into a big indie anthem chorus and everything. Pffffff – keep it MINIATURIST, Nathan. Keep it SMALL (she says in caps).

Kick: But the section where it chops up like the Aurora Borealis downloaded in increments is loo-o-o-oovely!

Everett: Really not my cup of java. It's too swirly. Sounds prog. Dunno why. Maybe the swirly synths?

Kick: You hate nature! And machines!

Everett: I do. It's true (sobs).

Frances: I love everything. But this is too sloppy and lighters-in-air. All it needs is some stupid boy singing over the top. Instant hit.

Everett: Sloppy nature... you see? That's why I don't like this.

Kick: Aw, I like it. It makes me achey for parts of my past that are gone forever.

Le Club Des Chats

Yes Madame! (Le Vilain Chien)

Parlez-vous Antifolk Français? A homme/femme duo who manage to be unhinged and double-jointed at the same time, with a website stuffed with cat pictures, cat videos, catzines...

Frances: ZUT ALORS!

Kick: I never think of the French as serving up much in the way of funnies, but there is this really full-on absurdist humour they manifest sometimes...

Frances: This is rendering me speechless cos it's really funny and ace.

Everett: They love cats! We love cats! They like to shout and shriek in odd voices over a kid's drum set! We like to listen to them shouting and shrieking in odd voices over kid's drum sets! Let's have their children!

Songs are over in – what – 45 seconds?

Frances: It reminds me vaguely of a track off a Brigitte Fontaine album, but of course she's

being all serious, and these people are most likely... not. That's not a diss of either of them.

Kick: Cursory guitar lines used more as of percussion and... um, duck quacks?

Frances: Their attitude to cats is entirely righteous. Up there with Louis Wain.

Kick: I bet a lot of dada cafe performances sounded not dissimilar to this.

Frances: Cats are deserving of both worship and ridicule. That's the way to appreciate a cat. It is a god, but it is also a fool.

Kick: There is a corner of Montmartre which will be forever silly.

Digitalism

Idealistic (Kitsune/Virgin)

This German two-way function first came to prominence by remodeling indie Jekylls into disco Hydes before releasing a long-player which sounded more like a sci-fi mini-series. This is an angry-sounding emission from the same.

Frances: From sincerity and cat-worship, we go... IRONY!

Everett: Used to know a Goth called Digitalis Man: wore a full suit of chain-mail for his wedding; and had an obnoxiously long ponytail. Wonder if this is him?

Kick: I dunno if they are massively ironic. They write 'suites' about flying to Jupiter and stuff...

Frances: Right, OK, and how is that not ironic? I'm quite intrigued by the creeping prog-ism of dance music, but I do not approve. They are just appropriating the surface aesthetic of space rock.

Everett: I think the last time I went to a rave this was playing. Fifteen years ago.

Kick: This whole synth-as-supersize-metal-guitar has had its moment, I suspect.

Frances: And that sucked-in sound.

Kick: It's one thing to say that when we've got it isolated in the lab – but loud enough on the dancefloor, and the obvious stuff just works... it's pretty Pavlovian...

Frances: Yeah, I'd dance to this at 3am while feeling utterly, abjectly sorry for myself. My feet would be dancing, but not my heart.

Or my ass. I'd be just moving my feet, waiting for it to be time to go home.

Everett: My ass would be dancing. But not my feet. That's a side effect of age.

Julian Donkey-Boy

It All Means Nothing To Me (Kum Ba Yah)

Apparently, they're Manchester's 'best-kept secret'. Not that well-kept, though – some idiot sent it to a national magazine! Heads are gonna roll...

Frances: I'm opposed to this from the start cos it's named after a Harmony Korine film. If bands are gonna name themselves after films they should pick something really odd, or uncool and mainstream. Like... *Shrek 2*.

Everett: *Silence Of The Elfs*.

Kick: *Cats And Dogs*.

Everett: *Look Who's Talking Too*.

Kick: *Spiderman*.

Frances: *Cats And Dogs* is really good actually! Have you seen it?

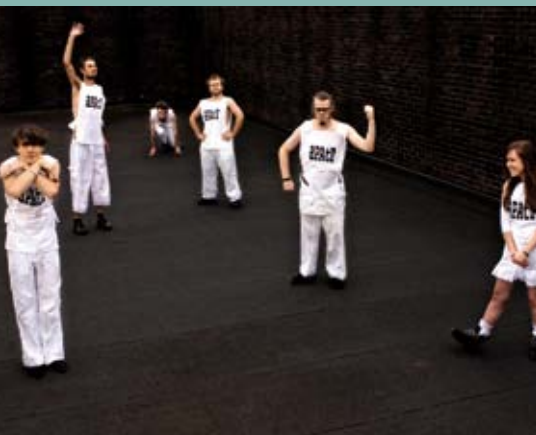
Kick: No – my mum complained at me that it was 'unrealistic'.

single of the month:

Everett: Les Club Des Chats – Yes Madame! (Le Vilain Chien)

Frances: These New Puritans – Numbers (Angular)

Kick: Those Dancing Days – Those Dancing Days (Wichita)



aPATt

Words: **Hayley Avron**

Photography: **Alexandra Wolkowicz**

All I wanted was an email address, a point of contact for the band. So why have I been playing Tetris, that ode to the joys of tessellation, for over 10 minutes? Because that's what their website made me do. Such is the power of aPATt's mental manipulation, the Liverpool-based ensemble can also make you dance, laugh, scrape your jaw off the floor, take mental notes to dig yourself out of whatever narrow channel of musical exposure you have dug yourself into and, according aPATt member General MIDI, perform "The dance craze sweeping the nation: 'The Chin Stroke'."

What attracted you all to each other?

General MIDI: "Skills, temperament: all the usual. Although, as we have progressed in time as a band, we have found that we have needed to be more efficient at choosing candidates. So much so that our most recent addition, The Count In, had to supply a full CV in order to apply for the position."

Why the uniforms?

General MIDI: "To permit an anarcho-syndicate regime. To dodge the spotlight. To scatter the front man/woman. To blank the canvas. To be seen in clubs with little light. To attract a mate."

What does aPATt set out to achieve and how close to the gold medal are you?

General MIDI: "aPATt is our life's work. We aim to do this till the end. What else is there to do in this pitiful stinking regime? Art and creativity are one of the few things we can't be charged for. Yet..."

And, as for spare time?

General MIDI: "We have two types of time zones. Rent time zone and aPATt time zone. All time is distributed between these aspects. Our aim is to turn rent time into aPATt time (somewhat ironically enabling aPATt to deal with the rent). There is some recreational study also. Language, semiotics, culture, taking drugs, history, colouring in, raising families, etc."

What is each individual member of the band scared of and what does that say about you?

General MIDI: "Bad soundmen – Anal cunt."
Dot Wav: "Coming on, on tour – Woman."
Field Marshall Stack: "Yet another 'laptop noise' band in support – Musician."
The Count In: "Synths breaking – You break synths."
The Master Fader: "Forgetting to wear fake tattoo on stage – Perfectionist."

aPATt are concurrently an enticing, bewildering and daunting prospect. They can sweep through several genres in the space of an opening verse, rewriting musical histories with a collectively raised eyebrow. If you so much as dip your toes in to test the water, you find yourself dragged into a Wonka-esque tour of expertly-executed skits that take in Zappa, classical music, both ancient and modern, punk, jazz, metal and a whole bundle of stuff that hasn't been invented yet. Dexterous, monstrous and mind-wideningly wondrous.

www.apatt.com



torche

Words: **Frances Morgan**

Illustration: **Dimitri Simakis**

Torche are a metal band from Florida whose self-titled debut album is studded with pop melodies and can be found lurking on Scottish post-rock label Rock Action. Recorded in 2004 only a few months after the band converged from various sources (including sludge progenitors Cavity) Torche's 2007 reissue wears a picture of a spewing volcano wreathed in swooshing rainbows, the rings

A spewing volcano wreathed in swooshing rainbows

of Saturn and a load of big white daisies. Clearly, Torche are not a band to bother themselves with genre conventions. The sound within is equally contrary: a seesawing rock-fall whose texture is at once lush and brutal, sticky and soaring, immense and intimate.

Throughout *Torche*, the steamrolling riffs and drums are bedecked with Steve Brooks' poignant vocal melodies, which are layered up in wide-apart, sonorous harmonies. Brooks tested out this marriage of melody and noise in previous band Floor, but the little I've heard suggests that that band never ventured quite far enough towards either extreme – and certainly not *at the same time*, which is what makes Torche so fun. Here, Brooks' voice circles around some surprisingly, well, *indie* lead guitar, surrounded by a psychedelic fuzzscape

closer to Flying Saucer Attack than any metal reference points, yet the pace, force and sheer weight of the riffing and rhythm point to deep roots in the harder stuff. Lyrics are minimal, and oddly disorientating: vampires, Napalm and suchlike in a style more generally associated with the vague but solipsistic subject matter of avant-rock, or the love'n'loss of vintage power pop: a smooth strip of iridescent bubblegum pulled from a gaping metal maw. Yum! What gives, Torche?

"I'm a huge fan of groups like The Mamas And The Papas, The Beach Boys, Bubble Puppy..." says Steve Brooks. "I also listen to a lot of Eighties rock and alternative music. Sonic Youth, My Bloody Valentine, Dinosaur Jr and The Jesus And Mary Chain are big inspirations. I understand the power in both noise and melody."

"Did I mention I hate singing?" he laughs. "Unfortunately, no one else in this band will do it."

Torche's new mini-album, *In Return*, sees the band strike out for more hostile territory, with 'Bring Me Home' galloping along at a demonic pace miles from Torche's blissed, windswept elegies and 'Tarpit Carnivore' striking a gnarled stake into any hopes of multi-hued harmonies.

"The *In Return* EP is probably the most 'metal' recording we'll do," agrees Brooks. "We were coming into our own with these songs." But, he adds, "We don't think like a metal band. We get to the point quick and end it there. Our approach to songwriting is more inspired by short basic punk and indie rock. It doesn't have to be epic to rock."

Regardless of length, there's certainly an epic, timeless quality to the psychedelic aureole that surrounds every track from the brutal to the blissful – and one that seems to remain comfortably consistent wherever Torche head, from the dark sunshine of Torche's 'Fire' to the closing bad-trip squalls of *In Return*'s 'Hellion', to whatever they come up with on next year's follow-up full-length album. Or, to put it another way, Torche's music is an all-angles headfuck that's thorough, yet affectionate – always the best kind.

www.myspace.com/torche

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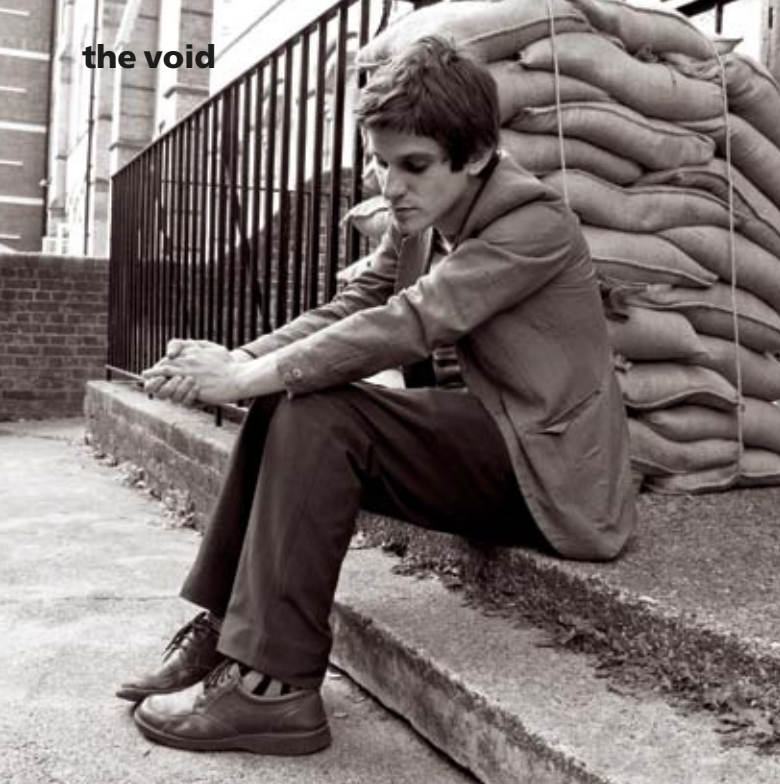
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monster bobby

Words: **Natalie Boxall**

Photography: **Björn Schütrumpf**

Monsters are scary. Fact. But not Monster Bobby (aka Bobby Barry). He's more the kind that is very scared.

One thing that frightens him are questions about love. He prefers to talk about polka dots and the pleasure of anachronisms, even though he writes about love through the purest, accessible form there is – pop.

"When I was a kid I listened to heavy metal, and only really started buying pop singles when Girls Aloud were getting really good, Justin Timberlake was doing amazing stuff, Sugababes were getting better, and Timbaland and the Neptunes were still on form. I get bored very easily,

'It's about haunting, and being haunted'

and a lot of stuff that all the press seem to go wild over these days sounds like stuff I've heard before."

A lone ranger with only his sampler for company, he likes the idea of "sampling Steve Reich or whoever [as] it's like having them up on stage with me, taking the pressure off a bit. I've got into the habit of referring to my sampler as my friend and kind of quarrelling with the thing on stage."

Although he's better known for earlier projects (more of which later), right now, him and his 'band' are peddling their debut album *Gaps* – a woozy lo-fi thing that meanders

through easy listening and creepy indie and arrives at pure pop.

It ended up a "willfully noisy" affair as, "I've always liked that thing when a melody that you might hum to yourself collides with a wall of extreme noise – after we'd recorded, we went through each track adding a layer of noise and distortion to just about everything."

Gaps is about "the gaps in consciousness, the violence of memory, the limits of love, perception, and the importance of lost causes. It's about haunting, and being haunted – by people, memories, and sounds."

At 26 he's lived a few lives already. "I first started a band when I was about eight with my friend Thomas and his older brother William. None of us could play any instruments and we didn't ever write any songs, but we had a band name and individual stage names and all sorts of ideas."

As a precocious teen he drank and played in Brighton, ended up promoting club nights, gigs, a fanzine called *Totally Bored*, and then went on to mastermind The Pipettes.

"[The Pipettes] was an idea I'd had knocking around in my head for several years. I considered it a pipe dream and didn't really expect to ever get round to doing it until an old friend persuaded me to actually get the thing together."

It's not just in name that he's living a double life, as "being in The Pipettes is a full time job which just about pays the rent, although touring on my own is a very different experience. On Monster Bobby tours I'm frequently crashing on promoter's sofas, and making new friends – seeing towns from an (almost) insider's perspective and the personal connection with everyone that's involved in the gig – things I sometimes miss when out on with The Pipettes."

Prolific. Focused. Well-travelled. Not scary.

www.myspace.com/monsterbobby

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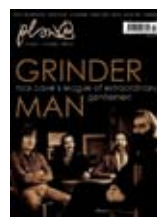
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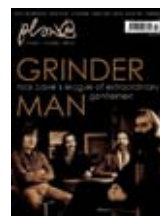
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CSS, Slayer, Outsider Music, Spinto Band, Circulus, Black Angels, Zombi, His Name Is Alive, Team Shadetek, Raintance Film Festival, MF Grimm



Issue 14

The Gossip, Ronnie Spector, new Osaka noise, Camera Obscura, Dead Moon, MWard, Noisettes, Casiotone For The Painfully Alone, James Holden

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CARGO COLLECTIVE

PRESENTS

Ariel Pink – Scared Famous

The tracks selected for Scared Famous were all recorded at a key moment in Ariel's recording adventure, dating back to, or immediately following the recordings on "House Arrest."
Human Ear Music CD



Magic Markers – Boss

Idiosyncratic song structure and melodies interspersed with a destructive drum stomp are reminiscent of the early electrified blues of Junior Kimbrough, or the black hole rhythms of Kousokuya.
Ecstatic Peace CD

Electric Eel Shock-Transworld Ultra Rock

Electric Eel Shock have a unique sound and vision of rock & roll that simply refuses to stay in one box. Kerrang: "Total Rock & Roll magnificence..."
Double Peace LP&CD



Supersilent – 8

Groundbreaking quartet celebrate 10 years with a stunning new album exploring dark and mysterious pathways beyond categories and comparisons. Produced by Deathprod.
Rune Grammofon CD

Eliza - Empire Fall

Best known as former lead singer of Icelandic rock band Bellatrix, Eliza Newman now launches her solo debut. Haunting vocals, sparkling melodies, the heartbreaking delivery of Nico & the power pop of Blondie.
Imprint CD & Download



Flykiller-Experiments In Violent Light

"Razor sharp machete beats, these electro terrorists have been exploding the NME's head" NME. "A spaced out, menacing melange of super-freak surrealism that's deadlier than a fly-swatter. Buzzin" The Fly
Flykiller CD

Jonquil - Lion

Anthemic and timeless in the best possible sense; the sound of a band not so much finding their feet as striding headlong into something great.
Try Harder CD



Spleen - Nun Lover

Rob Ellis & Josh Klinghoffer (Beck/PJ Harvey) deliver a new slab of "warped avant-funky blues" somewhere between The Magic Band, Tom Waits & Ligeti.
Sartorial Records CD

six.byseven – If Symptoms Persist Kill Your Doctor

six.byseven return with a tightly knit concept album inspired by the BBC documentary The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom by British filmmaker Adam Curtis.
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some of us STILL BURN

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **Vincent Vanoli**

When not editing-in-chief some magazine or other, **The Legend!** likes nothing better than crowdsurfing the darker spaces of his hometown



The Hope, Brighton

Three Brighton shows, in under a week: the first is in support to swirling, earnest Gosport sorts The Strange Death Of Liberal England – just me and Noah Taylor playing the duras, an odd droning Greek instrument that he frequently uses a bow on (it's a relative of the bouzouki and mandolin). I'm somewhat perplexed, faced by an audience of kids half my age, most of whom seem to think that sitting on the floor and paying attention to the band on stage is a perfectly acceptable way to behave at gigs. I throw caution to the winds – wheeeee! – and begin, solo, with the old standby, 'Death Don't Show No Mercy'. There's nothing like a good death song to raise the spirits.

It's only halfway through I realise I'm singing a Young People song, not my old Negro spiritual standby (which actually goes "There's a man going round taking names..."). That's fine, but after about 10 minutes of Noah playing some incredible drone and feedback and attacking the amplifier with one of his (now broken) clarinets, I realise I need a theme, so I mutilate an old Legend! number and an old TV Personalities number to fit the time signature and chord progression, stumbling over the "Happy all of the time" line so that it's repeated in slow motion 40 times, like a decaffeinated version of Oneida (um, minus the drums, guitars and rock). The crowd throw me entirely, by clapping and nodding appreciatively. There's more people here tonight than the next four Legend! shows put together.

Afterwards, the promoters assure me that my biggest fan and hugest enemy are both here tonight (I ruined an entire Daniel Johnston show for him). On reflection, I'd prefer to meet my detractor. I can't stand support networks.

The Hub, Brighton

Man, this is dismal. It ain't so much the lack of people as the... I lie, it is so much the lack of people. This is ostensibly a *Plan B* evening, and I've invited both the superb, scintillating Pete And The Pirates and downbeat, lovely Mathew Sawyer down to

play, and no one's here; gone up to Truck Festival or London or the fucking Earls Court Motor Show, I have no idea, they all got cancelled anyway due to flooding, ha ha, no I didn't mean that, just upset no one showed up... Previous time me and Noah played at The Hub, we had the ladies from Wet Dog whooping loud support and grinning weirdly: this time (with regular keys man, Chris Anderson on mellifluous, Elton John-like melodies) I play my Alcoholics Anonymous card, throwing in my, "This one goes out to my 21-year-old self, fucked up on alcohol" lyric (change age as applicable), repeated a ton of times until no one is under any illusion that I'm 1) a self-pitying asshole, and 2) I may have, at some point, once enjoyed the odd glass or 50, but hell, I'm better now and can even talk about it on public – look! I segue this into the song about Daniel

My biggest fan and hugest enemy are here tonight

Johnston because I thought maybe some of the Stolen Recordings lot would appreciate it... I say song. I mean improvised nonsense... and then, after Noah has bowed the spit and shine off his strings, me and Chris improvise a very downward turned song, with a melody, based round partings and emptiness and the ending of life, and streets that are bereft of even street lights... er, yes. I'm in a fine mood.

Hanover Community Centre, Brighton

Odd one, this. In support of Holly Golightly – who later on packs the place out, playing a storming gig, ably assisted by a pair of wonderfully unconscious dancing seven-year-old girls – we go on just as doors open, and thus play to about a dozen, severe-looking seated hippies, plus the

man from *Artrock*, who afterwards raves about Chris and Noah's "brutal minimalism and dreamy semi-improv", adding that I "look like a man traumatised by some past event, lost in a previously experienced nightmare which returns to strike him down repeatedly", but I reckon he was only buttering me up in the hope of a writing gig at *Plan B*, so whatever – um, no disrespect. Upon taking the stage, I note there are several kids (and I mean kids: five years old, and under) in the, um, deserted hall and realise I oughtn't to swear... which takes away 90 per cent of my lyrical 'content'. Fuck it. Me and Chris throw in a traumatically different version of the final 'song' from the previous night (mainly because Chris can't remember what speed he played it in, and opts for a funereal speed, figuring that's safest as far as my melancholy goes).

Before, we pop up the road for a pint (Noah), a glass of wine (Chris) and nothing (me); and snaffle some chips on the way back, unbeknown to our wives. Strikes me this might be the final show that Noah's partner Emily saw, before she gave birth... rotten luck, kid. Don't worry. It gets better from hereon in.

Pressure Point, Brighton

Now, *this* is depressing. In support of Steve Gullick's melancholy, meandering and layered Tenebrous Liar, plus two other bands (the bearded Virgin Passages: and Revenge Of Shinobi, whose raw-throated Animal Collective-style music sounds ace through the floorboards of this rain-soaked venue)... and there really is no one here, just a close-to-tears promoter, Steve and his wife making the introductions – "Hi, I'm Everett and I'm recovered now, thanks" – and a dazzling disco spotlight, which means I can entirely forget where I am, and sing as if in a neon-bright, noise-heavy vacuum. Andrew Clare has replaced Mr Taylor – and even if his skronk guitar noise isn't at its usual pitch, it's still ace: and the number where he goes into stop-start noise jazz overload and I try to imitate his abrasions with a word-less vocal while Chris honks down the sax is damn good fun; and sounds



playlist: boomkat

Words: **Shlom**

Illustration: **Walker**

Various

Thai Pop Spectacular 1960s-1980s (Sublime Frequencies)

Super-obscure collection of weird and wonderful Thai pop music from this supremely good label, beautifully put together by the Sun City Girls' Sir Richard Bishop.

Daphne Oram Oramics (Paradigm)

Daphne Oram was a founding member of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop and was described by Delia Derbyshire as "one of the most important people in the history of electronic music." Includes the mindblowing 'Pulse Persephone', an office favourite.

Rustie Jagz The Smack EP (Stuff)

One part Dubstep, one part lo-slung hip hop beats *a la* Flying Lotus, Rustie has supplied the year's most devastating selection of sharp beat-edits and lo-end rubs with this unhinged debut EP.

Bruce Langhorne The Hired Hand OST (Petite Blast First)

Beautiful soundtrack to the 1971 Peter Fonda film of the same name. The music here is at least two decades ahead of its time, veering from wildly inventive solo lap steel work to documentary-style soundscaping that Boards Of Canada would be proud of.

White Mice

White Mice (Basic Replay)

Digital Dancehall of the highest order from the mid-Eighties. Not the most fashionable era for sure, but the interplay of percussive edits and warm, padded basslines here is just about the best of its kind from any era, ever.

Sonic Youth

Daydream Nation: Deluxe Edition (Geffen)

The jury's still out in this office as to whether *Daydream Nation* or *Sister* is the best Sonic Youth album, though with the former now expanded to include a full extra disc of previously unreleased material we reckon it just about gets it. And the best opening track of any album ever made, which is a bonus.

T++

Allied / Tensile (T++)

Berlin's Torsten Pröfrock has been involved with pretty most of the city's important techno movements, from early work for Basic Channel's Chain Reaction imprint through

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his production for monolake and now as T++. Oh, and he works at the super-influential Hardwax shop, so triple props.

JD Emmanuel

Wizards (Dreamtime Taped Sounds)

Amazing collection of analogue electronic experimentations from 1982 that sounds like a lost early masterpiece from Kraftwerk or Terry Riley. A beautiful vinyl reissue, props to Volcanic Tongue for making us aware of it.

Cover before out-there (or thereabouts) music vault Boomkat's frighteningly well-organised online *retrain labyrinth*. They like a list (or two, or lots). www.boomkat.com

startlingly polished...um, OK, 'polished' isn't the right word. In between each song I can hear Steve Gullick's disembodied voice. "Thank you," I say. "No, thank you," the bodiless voice retorts. "No, thank you"...and so on. Perversely, I enjoy this show the most out of the four Brighton nights – and Tenebrous Liar's cover of Cat Power's 'Nude As The News' is rather special.

After, one of the other bands starts asking me and Andrew and Chris about our rehearsal regime. Hm...

rampART, London

My first experience of antifolk (London) and it's as I hoped – a Whitechapel squat, launch party for the compilation: everyone is greeted by first name as they walk in; free booze behind a makeshift bar. Not that I drink now, you understand...having done my best to turn the last four Legend! shows into impromptu AA meetings, especially when I segue into my rant about, "*How all my friends have deserted me/Left me a long time ago/Stumbling along blind in the gutter/Didn't want to stick around to see the mess they'd made of my life/Those damn friends of mine...I still miss them, swagging along the street with me/One in each hand/A bottle of whiskey and a bottle of vodka...*"

All the antifolkers play sardonic, droll tales that a) have a punch line and b) are catchy and c) have a guitar. I have none of these, and feel somewhat intimidated by all the good-natured male camaraderie, and first name heckling, so when I perform my brief impromptu set, I ask the audience if they want my happy or my sad set.

"There's not much difference," I explain, "except I smile for the happy set." I bottle it, and play it safe: a rant through my alcohol linkage into my rant about waking up one morning next to my girlfriend looking like Courtney Love who now looks like the living personification of evil, and then – no gaps, no room for peer approval – into my punk/joke numbers, a cappella renditions of 'Do Nuts' and a full-throated scream through 'Rockaway Beach', that Scrappy from Milk Kan and JJ Crash continue singing as I leap off off the stage.

Filthy Pedro comes up to me as I exit, "That sounded quite Spinmaster Plantpot-ish." Um. Yeah.

12 Bar Club, London

Backstage, Sarah from Wet Dog is bouncing Plantpot on her knee. Swig water ostentatiously from my metallic water bottle, and tell everyone it's tequila.

Decide to sing entirely a cappella, but segue my rant about Daniel Johnston into a TV Personalities song which confuses any number of people...alright then, one. The audience is strangely quiet (was anyone even there?) until the final two numbers when, given the considerable bonus of having a full-on rock band (well...Wet Dog, anyway) in support of my dulcet choirboy shriek, there's an unseemly break-out of pogo-ing, courtesy of Filthy Pedro, and the aforementioned Plantpot. I always did love dancing used as a tool of sarcasm.



new bad dream

Words: **Daniel Spicer**

Photography: **Cat Stevens**

Magik Markers overwrite improvised clichés in a bid to find what's on the other side of noise

Meet enough musicians and you start to realise that the artists we imagine them to be are often artificial constructs hiding their true identities. Whether deliberately assumed or projected by the audience, sometimes it seems like everyone's wearing a mask. And when you catch them falling off, it can really take your breath away.

Witness Elisa Ambrogio playing live with Magik Markers, a feral witch-poet calling down curses and channelling crazed ancestor-ghosts in a fury of rage. Now meet her in person and find yourself amazed to discover a delicate girl, polite, almost impossibly sweet, whose eyes fill quickly with tears of honest happiness when she thinks you understand her.

But there's nothing phony or accidental about Elisa's masks. She knows exactly what she's doing.

The personae she wears are a deliberate vehicle for the oldest artistic impulse of all: to tell stories and act out the themes that speak directly to the tribe-mind. When you hear her songs, don't ever expect to catch a glimpse of the real Elisa. She explains: "One of the things that annoys me most about modern music is the emphasis on the personal – the 'I'. If you're telling someone else's story I think you lose the restraint that you would have if it's your own."

The Magik Markers new CD *Boss* is a nightmarish collection of morality tales, laying down a bad-ass outlaw vibe: the glowering sky, the desert, the road. Their first since the amicable departure of Leah Quimby in 2006, it's crawling with the darkest primal figures of America: Robert Mitchum's insane preacher from *Night Of The Hunter*, the Manson Family, Jim Morrison's "killer on the road". Just like America, the threat of violence lurks everywhere.

"It's totally about America," Elisa agrees. "It's about regeneration through violence and the strange beauty that couldn't help but exist even though the means by which it came were violent and horrible. Like the way Richard Yates or John Updike paint America. There are certain writers who just capture this."

Any writer will tell you that stories need structure. In music, that means songs. And *Boss* is full of them: riffs, verses, choruses, the whole deal – all hung on the primary American guitar forms of blues and rock, and underpinned by Pete Nolan's tight, even disciplined, drums. Opening track, 'Axis Mundi' comes on like a lost Sixties downer-psych classic, while 'Taste,' with its bonehead blues-stomp and sneering vocal hook, is an MTV hit in disguise.

It's a long way from the molten freedom of past releases like 2005's *I Trust My Guitar Etc* – but Elisa saw it coming: "To me, all of our records probably sounded closer to this in my head but we could just never really get it". As *Boss* proves, it's not been a question of 'can't play, won't play', more the result of ideological misgivings.

"One of the reasons Magik Markers avoided melody and song structure is because of the manipulative nature of them," Elisa explains. "It's going to hook people whether it's sincere or not." So why the change of heart? "It's a formula – it works. This structure is giving us room to communicate. Human communication is what's natural. The structure's just helping us do that."

Maybe it helps on a CD – using structure to get through the distances created by a removed experience, mediated through a commodity, absorbed by the listener in environments the band can't control. But as anyone who's been swept up in a feverish, scalding, spontaneous Magik Markers set will know the band has always displayed a deep mistrust of form. "Lightnin' Hopkins talks about the beat of the music being incantation," says Elisa. "In live performance it's never going to be a precise, didactic, mathematical set."

'It's about regeneration through violence'

This can make for thrilling unpredictability – Elisa stood on her howling guitar, calling out improvised invocations, possessed. Sure it can be exciting, but it's an all-or-nothing strategy for making contact.

"There are certain performances where people say to me, 'This sucks, I'm not into this'. I think, 'I know, but come with me, watch this, when we do it good, you're going to understand'. It's about the thing that's threading through it that has something in common with the beautiful things that inherently hook into your guts."

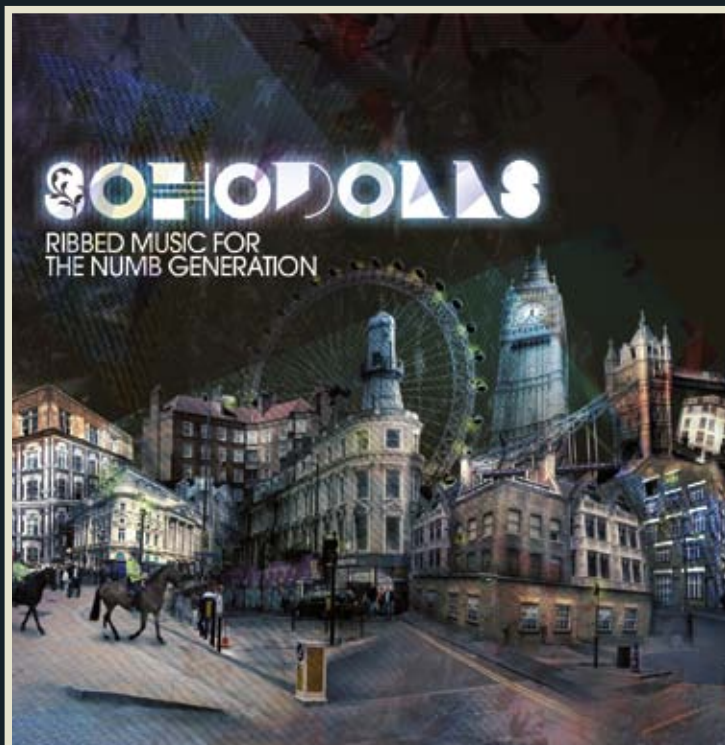
But, maybe inevitably, with this newfound feeling for song, performances might start to change. "In the past, a lot of Magik Markers sets were completely improvised. Now they have a shape. When we tour this there'll be songs, but maybe the guitar breakdown in 'Axis Mundi' might last 20 minutes instead of two."

Even so, you know what's going to happen: avant-gardistas will cry 'sell-out!' Is Elisa worried about a possible ejection from the heavy noise brethren? Not a bit. "It can become a pantomime if you stop challenging yourself. At the No Fun fest two years ago, Sandra Barrett from the Major Stars was watching a band and said, 'You know what this is? This is noise karaoke.' It's redundant. When does it get new again? You have to make it new."

In the end, it's all about balance, compromise and restraint. What's the point of power if you can't control it? "Everybody has it. Some people possess it too hard and use it in the wrong way. It's like having a gun in your pocket. You have to be killer gentle."

Killer gentle. That's exactly what's under Elisa Ambrogio's mask.

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personal geography: vashti bunyan

Words: Nicola Meighan

Photography: Brian Sweeney

The sound of life before and after, in and out of, the spotlight

First record you ever bought.

"Well, this was when I was about eight or nine: my sister liked Johnnie Ray, so I bought her a 78 from Woolworth's – they did this cut-price range of cover versions, so it was actually someone dreadful pretending to be Johnnie Ray.

It was for her Christmas, but when I was wrapping it up, I knelt on it and it cracked... and I was heartbroken. I think I gave it to her anyway."

Record you played for your babies.

"I had utterly nothing to do with music for so long – all the time I was travelling, all the time I was living in the middle of nowhere – so I didn't have a record player when my

Song you wish you'd written.

"There's a song called 'Corvair' by Jim White – about an old car in his yard that's a home for the birds now... it's so beautiful. Always stops me in my tracks. I absolutely love it. And yes, I wish I'd written it."

Record you'd play to explain who you are to a stranger.

"Well it *wouldn't* be 'Diamond Day'. [Chuckles] Maybe 'Up With People' by Lambchop – I pore over the words to that, I just love it to bits – it's one of my favourite songs of all time."

Record that's had most impact on you.

"Too many to mention – Buddy Holly, The Everly Brothers, JJ Cale, *Pet Sounds* – and

I think that I could possibly...while very drunk...*maybe*..."

Favourite record to sing along to.

"Robbie Robertson, 'In The Blood'. I didn't know much about him until I got together with Al – although we've known each other for 30 years, we've only been together 15 – but before that, whenever I visited, Al would always have records on.

"So when we got together, I finally found out who all these people actually were – The Band, Steely Dan, Jackson Browne...I never knew Jackson Browne when he was current! That's absolutely *ridiculous*."

Record that makes you nostalgic.

"*Hats* by The Blue Nile. That's what it's about, I guess – that incredible yearning. Al sent it to me when we were first – well, we weren't quite together when he sent it – but let's just say we were certainly together afterwards...I can just see him now, putting *Hats* in the post, thinking, 'Oh yeah, that'll knock her socks off'. [Laughs] It worked!"

Record that reminds you most of your own childhood.

"My father played music all the time. Mostly organ music, classical music, so I had – I have – all this music in my head, but I haven't a clue who's playing it, or who wrote it, or who's conducting it. But there was this one song, 'O For The Wings Of A Dove' – the original 1927 recording by Ernest Lough – and it was just beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. I played it *all the time*. They took the needle out of the gramophone to stop me, but I just got a sewing needle and held it carefully, carefully in the groove – I was so desperate to hear it..."

"O for the wings, for the wings of a dove!! Far away, far away, would I rove!! In the wilderness, build me a nest! And remain there, forever at rest..."

'They took the needle out of the gramophone to stop me, but I just got a sewing needle and held it carefully in the groove'

daughters were babies. I didn't have *anything* when they were babies..."

"But we did eventually get a car, and it had a tape player, and Bob Marley got stuck in it, for many years. My daughter says the only things she remembers from her childhood are Bob Marley and Bob Dylan. Otherwise: nothing. So really, they were deprived. [Laughs] They were *horribly* deprived."

Record you wish you'd heard when it was first released.

"David Crosby's *If Only I Could Remember My Name* [the former Byrd's 1971 solo outing]. An album that makes me regret dropping music from my life. If I'd heard it at the time, I might have carried on..."

of course [devout fan] Devendra Banhart's first album is incredibly important to me, because it was the start of something...huge..."

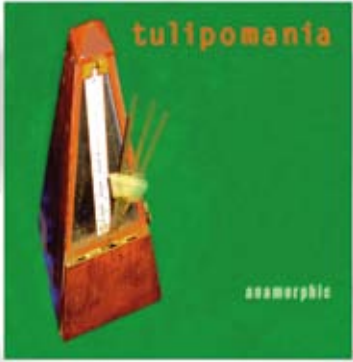
Least likely record in your collection.

"There's a singer, Monica – you know, Brandy and Monica – and I love her solo version of 'The Boy Is Mine'. It's such a wonderful, brilliant piece of recording. And the way she sings: so great. I've lost my copy and I think it's been deleted now. We've just literally taken the house apart trying to find it."

Favourite record to dance to.

"Well I can't dance so that's that. [Cackles] But if I could dance, then there's a wonderful album – *Desmond Dekker And The Aces* – and

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when we meet

Words: **Noel Gardener** and **kicking_k**

Plan B presents its 13-step program to combat musical boredom

Afrikan Boy

His tales of shop-lifting (badly) from Lidl and Asda got him a guest-spot on MIA's latest record, and the Nigerian ex-pat (and now first-year psychology student) has found time to unleash a first mixtape, *Can Of Whoopass*. If the grime scene sometimes risks fixating on gesture and attitude, Afrikan Boy is disarmingly straightforward (and admirably non-melodramatic) about poverty and visa issues. More immigrants in British music, please. www.myspace.com/afrikanboy

Brothahood

The grime scene in Cardiff is small in terms of dedicated nights and visible producers/MCs, but large in terms of raw enthusiasm and dedication to the form. The Brothahood trio and their locally

The Death Of Her Money

One hundred years ago, Loop made highly original and often extraordinary music by fusing Sabbath/Blue Cheer metal riffage to gun metal grey spacerock drone. The Death Of Her Money hint (albeit by accident) at what Loop might have done having ingested Neurosis and early Isis. Album arrives soon on Superfi/Rat Patrol Records. www.myspace.com/thedeathofhermoney

Night And The City Of Broken Promises

All the good clichés of Nineties emotional hardcore without the



Lispector

One mademoiselle and her red keytar (but only MySpace pix of the latter until now – see above). “You can change the way you look/But not the books you’ve read,” she sings over low notes that wheeze like old air conditioning. “Like a ping-pong player, play along with someone/Roll him into a ball, go along with the game/Kick the ball about, you know it’s a gamble/Take it anyway, it may pay off one day,” she adds, over a spiderweb rhythm track. And when was the last time you had a new favourite lyricist? www.myspace.com/lispector

Quasi-improvised ambient drone nothingness (in a good way)

available mixtapes embody the clipped, hyperminimal and electro-ish end of grime, with flows hammered out at speed camera-bothering pace. www.myspace.com/brothahooduk

David Mysterious

He lives in Exeter but is Welsh in all but where his bills get sent. A very big Monks fan, he spins their (and others) Sixties thudbeat and proto-garage into loop-pedal psychedelia and lo-fi of the tape release, Shrimper Records type. The results: splendid – and out shortly in album form on the Cardiff-based Peski label. www.myspace.com/theda



Drunk Granny

Awkward post-Ladyfest pop played with conviction – loping, yelping, more-or-less-harmonising, meandering, and moving. We need the weak voices. We need the outsiders who find each other and build ever greater safety in ever greater numbers. Or...as they would have it: “Edie and DB are finally living out what they probably should have done when they met nearly 10 years ago – working in Tesco.” www.myspace.com/drunkgranny



Mehr Licht

Galic geniuses take classical recordings, and shred them into what's pretty much electro-opera. Yeah, you read that correctly. What's more, check the emoticon in the centre of that genre we (and, OK, they) just invented, now click on the link. Yr face will soon be doing exactly the same thing... (Further background colour: this profile written on the day of Pavarotti's death, and Mehr Licht sound like it – not so much 'Candle In The Wind' as 'C4 In The Void'.) www.myspace.com/diemehrlicht

rolling on the floor and dressing like cartoon librarians. Mohinder, Swing Kids and Drive Like Jehu crushed like bugs and pressed into pulchritudinous vinyl artefacts (with free CD-Rs for the, uh, technologically advanced) on their own label, Detournement. The next one is their debut LP. www.nightandthecityofbrokenpromises.tk

The Sound Of Aircraft Attacking Britain

On-off performers drawn from Cardiff's experimental art scene since near the century's start, SAAB have come good of late with a fistful of irregularly-shaped packages containing bewitching

CDRs. Where these tend towards quasi-improvised ambient drone nothingness (in a good way), they're capable of delivering a large double-drumkit Krautrock rinseout live. www.myspace.com/aircraftattackingbritain

Taint

Raised by Swansea but currently based in Cardiff, Birmingham and London respectively, Taint have been going 13 years and are just about to release their second album. God willing, their arsenal of tech-sludge diamond-cutter riffmatics should stop people herding them into the stoner rock henhouse, which they grew out of long ago. www.myspace.com/taintuk

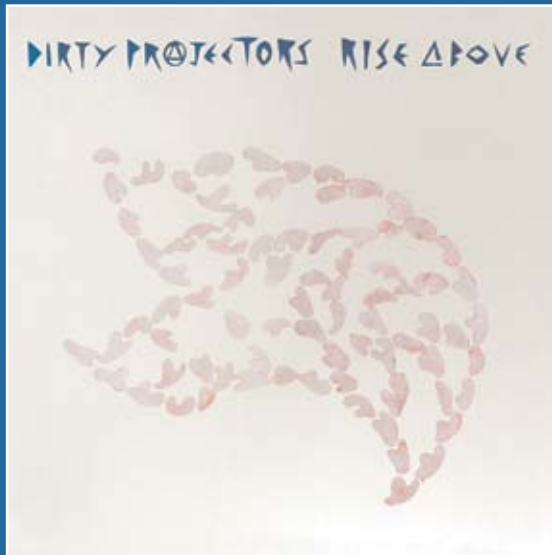
The Voices

Lauded only recently in this organ as “the bee's knees and then some”, The Voices sound like if anthropomorphic strobilights got jealous and formed a band. Very much at the business end of shoegazing, on disc they often sound like Spacemen 3's Krautier moments; live, they blast off like Flying Saucer Attack. www.myspace.com/thevoiceslostinconfusion

Zonderhoof

Instru-metal, while being the sort of subgenre name that probably shouldn't be encouraged, can still kick up treats like Zonderhoof. Their debut EP on UK indie Sound Devastation packs four wordless tracks into half an hour, which may make you think of Pelican's equivalent first flight; add the weighty lumber of the Melvins and some Sabbathian classicism and...BANG. www.myspace.com/zonderhoof

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chloe

Words: Emily Bick

You'd think Chloe was a superstar DJ. For the past nine years or so, she's been resident at Paris' (now defunct) Pulp club, a more chic version of London's (also defunct) Trash. From there she's had residencies all over Europe, and she's put out some stellar compilations. But to hear her talk, all that's a happy accident.

"That was just through, you know, my crew...I was a producer first, I was playing guitar, I was doing music at university..."

Chloe started producing and composing songs in the late Nineties, first on guitar, then electronically. What made her switch to composing electronically, and what electronic artists influenced her? "I was really into pop music from the Sixties, Seventies, nothing new," she answers, "then I went to a rave, and it was like a new world! I was really impressed. I went to a lot of parties, found lots of house and techno. But there wasn't, like, a *man* who took care of me and showed me how to use things..."

"I could be completely independent with electronic music," she clarifies. "I can direct a whole pop group, I don't need musicians, I can make the sounds I want. I'm using a lot of software now, I like to collect sounds with a microphone and turn them into hundreds of sounds. I collect them for months and then get bored of collecting, and compose."

She meticulously layers her tracks to suggest space and texture – close your eyes and you can feel the pockets and surfaces of sounds, like you're walking through an overstuffed wardrobe, navigating by sonar. 'Around The Clock' weaves organic crackles with trombones that dance at right angles. 'Beneath The Underground' loops rubber band string-twangs with satellite call-out signals, like a lullaby sung through a drainage pipe by a dripping stalactite.

Chloe sings like a cross between Cosey Fanny Tutti and what I'd imagine the French speaking clock sounds like when it's been unplugged for a while and its tapes are half-melted. 'I Want You' shows it off to best effect, and she double-loops her own come-on lyrics so she sounds both male and female, coming to get...everyone. It's scary. And hot.

"That is all about seduction," she tells me. "Of course you can say it's scary, but that's love: when it's scary it's seductive too." Indeed. But intelligence shines through Chloe's complex compositions, and that's the most seductive of all.

www.dj-chloe.com



hello cuca

Words: Lauren Strain

A lion with the sun for his mane and a puff of smoke for a tongue roars out at me. He peeks from the leafy vines and pinecones wiggling around this song sheet, all illuminated with bold drawings and lino prints. The post is good today. It's a parcel from Hello Cuca – two parts girl, one part boy, all parts Murcia, Spain – and the music etched within is an appealing nailbomb of panicked, sultry, FUN POWER.

'It's more like zine-writing: fast, cheap and out of control'

Meet and greet: Lidia (on steel strings, antiquated piano, mouth organ and yowls); sister Mabel (wordsmithery and bass-related rebellion); third sister Cuca, musically absent but seemingly their guru, and drummer Alfonso. (The Spanish for 'drums' is *'bateria'*. Don't you just *love* words?)

"We met Alfonso at a party – we made him a 'musical compatibility' test and he got a good score, so he was in," Mabel regales. "It was really Lidia's will to play music. She has the talent – I always thought it was really difficult to make songs, and I don't know a single note yet! I was like Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, listening to music and wondering how it worked."

Spurred on by the basic idiosyncrasy of Bikini Kill and Babes In Toyland, an alignment with strands of feminism and the make-your-own-entertainment

ethos that comes with growing up in immobile coastal towns – "boredom and sea waves" – Cuca manned instruments and their own imaginations to go DIY. "I remember hearing the Bratmobile/Heavens To Betsy split on K [records] and that was like, 'Eureka!' We started reading zines before hearing most of the bands they were talking about. Sadly, when we ended up hearing them, it was very disappointing! But then we discovered mail order, and that was a call to the twisting postman."

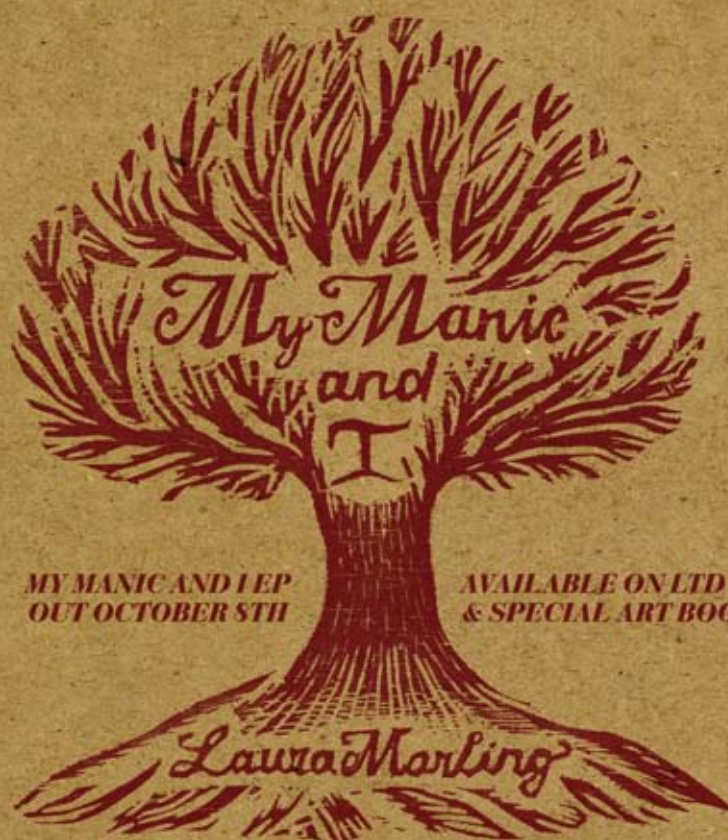
Operating through their own label, Rompepistas (which translates as 'floorshakers'), this latest project is a split LP with their friends Incrucificables, themselves an unhinged housewarming party of percussion like tiddly spiders in tap shoes. "We liked a lot of labels – Slampt, Vesuvius, Dischord...we weren't interested in sending demos, trying to make a career. It was more like zine-writing: fast, cheap and out of control."

YEP. In 'El Gato En El Árbol', electrics squiggle upwards, all tiny and cutting like kitten claws. Throughout, vocals are a messy game of Scrabble; vowels are knocked into flight and clicky consonants squeak with glee against dusty windowpanes. But where Cuca do cute, they also do fierce – for 'Ayúdame A Bailar', corrugated guitars serrate the playful snares and voices veer towards the insaniac.

Lyrics are enchanting, short-storyish; nowhere near naive, but definitely possessing a sweetness that isn't merely a byproduct of translation – "They're just this little story I want to tell, about how things could be instead of how they are, or maybe just some da-doo-ron-ron," explains Mabel, delightfully. Time signatures prickly in anticipation, full of colour, noise and surprise ("Stop! Stop! Look Here! Stop! Stop! This is for you!").

From their arpeggiating, jitterbug semiquavers to the last of Lidia's harmonica slurps, Cuca make you feel like you're a tyke with a spade, a bucket and hours to kill. Alternatively: "We want to make our shows like a sophisticated boom-boom party full of rock lobsters and Fujiyama mamas. We try to keep it on the sunny side."

www.rompepistas.com



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guided tour: the fiery furnaces

Words: **kicking_k**

Photography: **Emily Graham**

This article (and record) is not recommended for those with a low weirdness threshold

Having initially, cluelessly, treacherously been pitched as The White Stripes... On Drugs! by a British press keen to give the people what they used to want, The Fiery Furnaces have spent the time in between then and now comprehensively alienating anyone in search of trad thrills by questing from an epic synth-prog/pop album about pirates (*Blueberry Boat*), thru a singalong-a-spoken word record fronted by their grandmother (*Rehearsing My Choir*) to a radio-station-hopping melodrama (*Bitter Tea*).

And, if Matthew and Eleanor Friedberger's new record sees a less collagey/more live sound, with bass driving the syntax and guitar splurts providing punctuation, there is no let-up in what we'll politely call their 'formal promiscuity'. So, check yr inventory screen, drink yr potion of invisibility and have a sword+1 at the ready – we're entering *Widow City*.

The Philadelphia Grand Jury

Matthew: "My favourite – I would actually play the tune for fun. I don't know if that shows..." Well, it goes on for seven minutes. We laugh (me more than him). "The thing that I thought was fun about it was the long two-minute section where nothing happens... which I enjoyed. In a crude way, it was meant to illustrate the person waiting for the verdict to come down. There's that thing, the imitative fallacy – if you're writing about a character being incoherent and boring, you're not allowed to have the writing be incoherent and boring... But I think the song becomes, in that section, a little boring – hopefully in a pleasant way."

Automatic Husband

Eleanor: "I don't just want to say things about my singing, but that's the first thing that comes to mind... that one was really difficult." I don't want to say you're rapping, but you are kind of talking in rhythm... "Yeah, Matt and I both like the idea of putting in just a few too many syllables – we think it sounds really great. Once you get the rhythm of it, it's like I go into some weird zone, where it takes me a certain amount of time to get it figured out in my head and physically be able to do it."

My Egyptian Grammar

Eleanor: "Sometimes we talk a lot about each others' lyrics, sometimes I'd rather not. For 'My Egyptian Grammar', I'd rather not know. I know it's an actual book that Matt has, but that song is really pretty and very emotional to me – so I almost don't want to talk about the book and his own



'It has to be fun'

meaning for it because it makes me, I think, perform the song better if I have my own associations..."

The Old Hag Is Sleeping

Matthew: "I was playing the oboe setting on the Chamberlain [the American version of the Mellotron, used by the band for the first time here] and, at the bottom keyboard, one key played a cow mooing instead of the given oboe note." And this wasn't noted anywhere? "No. At first I thought, 'Oh, that's too bad, because I can't play it'. And then... it was actually a very lucky discovery. People ask me, 'Why did you put in the cow noise?' and I say, 'No – the Chamberlain put the cow noise in'."

Japanese Slippers

Eleanor: "That was something where we were in the same room and just shooting off of each other – Matt went to the piano and I did my best Bob Dylan impersonation." How often would you write in that way? "Not very often. I mean, sometimes we don't want to be in the same room together – not because we don't like each other – but we spend so much time together. It's kind of rare we do that now for fun. It has to be *fun*."

Navy Nurse

Eleanor: "Lyrics I wrote for this record are mostly taken from these old Seventies women's magazines all about being the ideal woman. I gave Matt a long story or script and he turned it into a song."

Matthew: "The verses suit Eleanor's most natural singing style." But you don't make her life that easy. "No, not always... I think that one is what a lot of people wish we sounded like." People have a low weirdness threshold. "That's right."

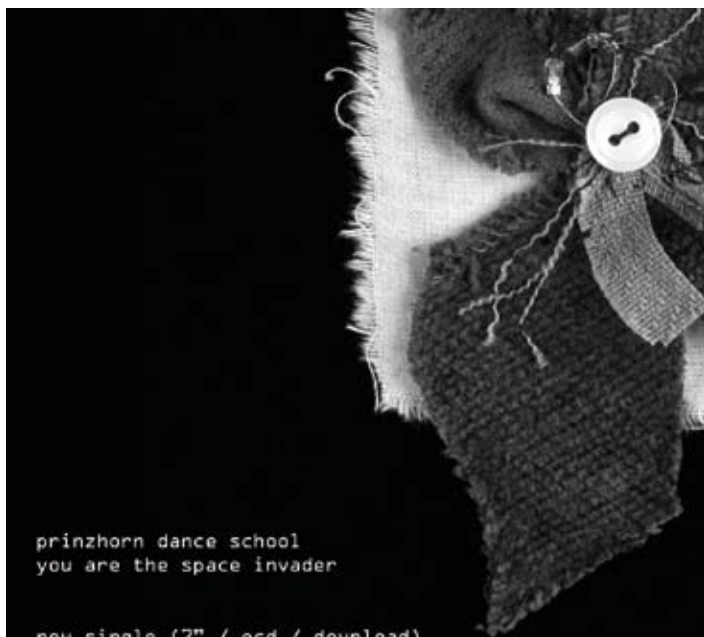
Right By Conquest

Matthew: "I tried to write these very long lines and just have the rhythm of the lines suggest what the tune would be – it looked like there was no way you could fit it in to a normal song form, but it was fun to do. It's our mother's favourite song on the record – but it's got the dirtiest lyrics. It's very silly, prudishly dirty, but still..."

Wicker Whatnots

Matthew: [responding to my suggesting many clock their complexity, but few their playfulness] "Highbrow music at the turn of the last century was probably classical art music, undiluted folk music and the lowbrow thing, simple pop tunes. But there'd also be *relatively* complicated lower-brow things like music hall in the wake of Gilbert and Sullivan... Some of our music is very complicated lowbrow music, there's a winking and quoting quality. It's not supposed to just work as what it is... I don't know if that makes sense..." For those of us who choose to get it, it totally does.

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still my playground

Words: **Ringo P Stacey**

Photography: **Sam Ashley**

Plan B has a nice sit-down and a chat with returning grime heavyweight **Trim**



'It's kind of hard being the don'

Trim rolls up on his mountain bike moments after his crew have introduced themselves. Photos first, and half a dozen kids, maybe 10, no more than 13 years old, gather round to watch. They're bemused but one thinks he knows what's going on. "Are you Trim?" he asks, then to his mates, "He's Trim from Roll Deep! I know he is, I seen him on Channel U!"

Trim, having none of it, jabs back in jest he's a football player. Then, with a smirk worthy of the mighty Roots Manuva he poshes up his accent for a tired and triumphant, "It's kind of hard being the don". The kids are impressed but unconvinced, "I'm sure you're Trim, you look bare like him," and defiant, "I'm sure you're MCs. Big up Hustler Kid!"

But we ain't here to speak to Hustler Kid, whoever he may be. We're grilling Trim. Older and wiser, rumbling authoritative voice like Moses, the man Hustler Kid probably wants to be.

Is it more important if you've got people with lots of money spending money on your CDs, or having those kids in there know who you are?

"That is cool, but they're hard to work with. That kid lives opposite my house. He sees me every day, asks me if I'm Trim. And I've actually been getting away with it, but today he's grilled me cos I'm taking pictures and that."

When you're giving advice on 'Confidence Boost', it's so down to earth. Like, "You can't smoke and be a footballer, too." Those are the kids you're talking to, right?

"Not just them, there's thousands. Not just the youth, I'm trying to talk to everyone, I'm trying to touch every person in the world. And if I have to do it by everyone just downloading me then I'll do

it, bruv. I get paid, still. You want some kind of payment, whether it be money or even someone saying they like a lyric. That's paying me as well, that's why I'm here."

He was two hours late, of course. We're on grime time here. Not reason to complain, but an opportunity to nose around Trim's Tower Hamlets neighbourhood, soak up the scenery. Round the park, bordered on two sides by an estate of manky edged flats, the other two by some marginally more salubrious looking semi-detached houses. There's a block where they keep the sports gear, set off by some nasty looking thick bodied barbs, the roof coated with non drying paint. There's the concrete volcano.

Just enough time to run round the corner for a piss, past the trio of pensioners nattering over a fence, to St George's pub, fresh with his flag flying clean outside, and back to wait on the bench while suspicious parents look sideways at the fat guy on the bench. Staring at a sign, "Can you help us? *SERIOUS ASSAULT. On Sun 5th Aug at about 4.30pm a victim was assaulted in St John's Park sustaining serious injuries by a group of males.*"

It's 4.30pm.

This is where you grew up, yeah?

"Not just this area, no. This is where I live now."

You say it's hell on earth, why?

"Cos of the way society's made us live, this is how we have to live now."

What's wrong with it?

"What's right with it, man? People think it's nice, people don't even know. This is where all the old taxi

drivers reside. This ain't for black people, but they grew up here. It's multicultural, and that's why I can accept it but where I grew up was a bit harder. They didn't really like black people, I used to get chased through the market with ball and chain. The BNP used to knock on our doors back in the day. They think it's all Rosy Lee round here, bruv."

What do you mean when you say you're asleep in the track 'I'm Asleep'?

"The scene thinks I'm asleep. When I was in Roll Deep my work rate was a bit slow. So, yeah, I'm asleep right now, but when I wake up it's a lot. But obviously I've done two volumes of *Soulfood*, three's finished, and I'll have four or five out before the end of the year. Then the album."

What changed?

"I live on my own, now. Before, I've lived in a hostel, I've been homeless, I've been living everywhere. I was on an ASBO as well, so they wasn't looking to help me get housing."

What's the difference in approach between a mix CD and an album? There's a few artists where they'll put out the mix CD and it's great, then they'll put out an album and...

"Yeah, it goes wrong."

...there's something about it, it's a little bit too smooth, maybe.

"What I will say is that I've listened to a lot of artists and I know where they go wrong. And I try and not go down the same path. I will not switch to American, like...not mentioning no names. I will always sound English and I will always be this guy, because this is my world, my head. It's too far into what I do for it to change to anything else."

www.myspace.com/trimbale

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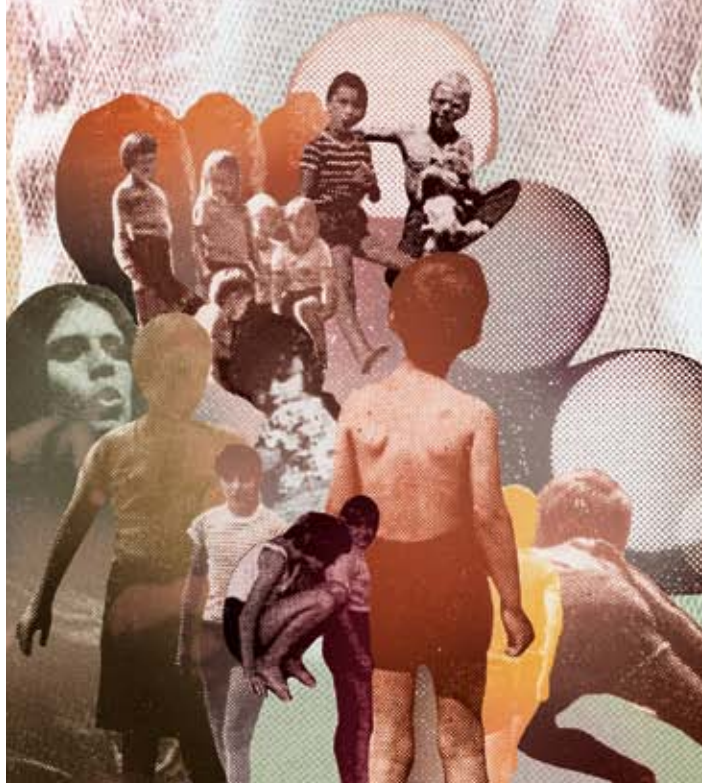
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Giddy Stratospheres

Words: **Everett True**
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Fall in love with the passionate, perfect pop of **Pete And The Pirates**
– boys with guitars in the best possible way



We'll sit in and we'll listen and we'll try and make sense, but if we don't, don't worry. Pop music doesn't always make sense. It isn't meant to. Pop music ennobles and inspires and makes me want to sway through the air, feet higher than my head, one swift graceful moment through years of decay and I'm six years old, bouncing from sofa to sofa, overcome with the merriment and wonderment of music.

Pete And The Pirates have twin lead guitars, and another couple of guitars on top, and three singers, and a drummer who doesn't believe in fills, and parts where everything drops away so when it does all come rushing back in you can barely contain yourself. They remind me of HOPE and VIGOUR and what it was like when I believed in factions; and they're on Stolen Recordings, who are a Flying Nun, an (early) Creation Records for 2007 – with about as much money, too – and they make my head swim. Listen. Let's listen in. See what the boys say.

Johnny: "In primary school when I was six or seven, we had a drummer come in to school assembly; and me and my three friends all said we wanted to become drummers. I was the only one who did: five or six years later I brought my first drum kit, and I've been drumming since. I've never had lessons."

Pete: "I play bass, do a bit of singing. I'm a volunteer. The reason I play bass is cos I want to be in a band with my friends; all these people had written really good songs and I wanted to join in, play them as a group rather than individually."

Peter: "I play guitar. The reason is because I met some guys who were older than me that played guitar and one of them was going out with a girl I really fancied. On my brother's guitar, I learnt Metallica and Iron Maiden. The next year I started learning folk guitar."

Tom: "I sing in the band because I was told I had to. All the other jobs were filled. I left the country for a while and when I came back these guys had formed a band and I really wanted to be in it, so I started coming along and standing at the side. I was told I shouldn't do that any more – that I should stand in the middle and sing. On a more general level, I play guitar and like writing music, and it's something I've done from an early age. I mastered a few chords and wrote a few songs, they were probably the best songs I ever wrote... sad songs, watching TV songs, smoking cigarettes on the bench songs, songs about animals and girls. I started playing guitar on my dad's 50th birthday and that's 17 years ago. It was a 12-string, which is why I found it so much easier on a normal guitar."

David: "I learnt a few different instruments as a kid – violin, recorder, flute and drums. I wasn't very good on guitar but I realised that if I told people I had a unique style they would believe I didn't want to be good... I'm still going by that."

That's the Johnny Ramone principle.

David: "I remember when I was a real young kid, watching a repeat of *Live Aid*, and seeing the drummer of Queen and thinking, 'God I don't want to be that guy, ever'."

Back already? Good. Let's play keep up. Johnny and Tom are brothers, formed a band when they were young. Pete and Peter knew each other. Were in bands together. All the band went to the same school, in different years. All of this in Reading, England. Did I mention their songs yet: plangent, evocative, harmonic, splendid, wide open songs – intricate and meticulous, but certainly not fussy. There's no room for excess when everything has been honed down so much. Shhh. Shhh. The boys are talking...

"Me and Pete did know each other, we used to hold hands on the way to school." "It was after school we started hanging around, playing songs. Everyone would compete and try and do better

read the label: stolen recordings

Stolen Recordings' vinyl and CDs come in hand-stamped and numbered sleeves (old-fashioned sweetie bags), with scratchy illustrations and inserts and paper clips; limited edition, of course. It reminds me of one of those old cassette labels, maybe Xpressway from New Zealand (home to The Dead C). But it's mostly the music I'm impressed with: this is surely the new home of the International Pop Underground – bands swaggering into town, with guitars on their sleeves and hope in their hearts, special and magical and slightly naïve, ramshackle and feverishly brilliant, artists like the desperately poignant Mathew Savvy and his Ghosts, Pete And The Pirates' offshoot band Tap Tap (virulent and passionate and full of the same open-hearted grandeur that once fuelled New Zealand bands such as The Chills and Bird Nest Roys). Bands like the fuzzed Gothic edgings of Candy, Screaming Tea Party's post-Factory rockabilly swagger, and the thousands of acts (well OK...23, then) that feature on the two Stolen compilations. And of course, Pete And The Pirates themselves: guitar noise and hard-edged indie pop like the words hadn't become dirtier than all creation through years of abuse.

There have been just 10 releases so far, but already they feel like the most important label in the world.

There are three people behind Stolen, making up the tiny rubber stamps and torn visuals, feverishly promoting the music with little or no budget. Rachael (art), Paul (recordings) and Merida (press) – all choose the music and make the decisions.

It's Paul who mostly responds to my questions.

What was your motivation behind Stolen?

"It started with a shit gig where Candy got shafted by a seedy promoter. There were threats of violence (from us!), we got a cab fare out of a cowering venue manager and vowed never to work with arseholes again. So we started our own night and told people we were a record label even though we hadn't put anything out. Running a night is the best way to hear music."

What was your first release?

"It was the Candy EP, 'Last Night'. From the sales of that, we made enough back to put two EPs out. I remember working out if every CD we put out sold enough to make another two, then in a thousand years we would rule the world."

You have a specific aesthetic: please talk us through it.

"Poverty helps. It just happens that way. It's the culmination of everything we have thought and experienced before. It's fluid. The artwork is influenced by the aesthetic of the bands and evolves around the music, the paper bags came about because we all hate plastic cases and wanted something good and cheap, Rachael found a place to get sweetie bags, and she makes up stamps and sources all the added bits and bobs. When it comes to packing the CDs, we get together with the bands hand have a drunken packing party."

Talk us through a Stolen Recordings night.

"The night usually starts with me getting up with a hangover and cooking food for the bands, then going to the venue for soundcheck, hanging out eating and listening to everyone play, then having a few drinks and last minute panics, then hopefully watching the best gig ever...this does happen from time to time and it makes it all worthwhile!"

Talk us through a Stolen Recordings compilation.

"They are like a big mix tape of everything we like at a certain time – one year is a good time frame. Songs often come from bands we've put on. But most are demos that are way too good not to come out and we think people should hear these songs. More often than not, demos are a million times better than the watered-down version that makes it to the shops. Demos have soul!"

How did you come across Pete And The Pirates?

"Wet Dog were playing one of our nights and we had a last minute cancellation. They told us about this great band called Pete And The Pirates, so thank you very much, Wet Dog. We were blown away. They were fucking amazing: fast, hypnotic with pure pop fug-outs. Within a week they were booked into the studio for their first EP."

Are there any other people you feel affiliated to?

"Anyone who makes the choice to do things their own way: Johnny Owen, Thomas Edison, Greg Berman...Sun Ra...Turner...Marco Polo, Lao Tsu, Les Paul, Joe Meek, Brian Eno, James Stewart, Captain Cook."

www.stolenrecordings.co.uk

Everett True





'Sad songs, watching TV songs, smoking cigarettes on the bench songs, songs about animals and girls'

songs." The voices merge. "There's definitely an element of competition as to who can write the best song: and even if one person writes a song, it then gets deconstructed or taken apart and put together with another song."

Pete And The Pirates played their first live show five years ago: put out two EPs and a single, and the album is finished. Their new limited edition single, 'Knots', is probably sold out as you read this: racy and frenetic and gobsmaacking (ref: The Bats, Television, Undertones for the energy, but these chaps are borderline studious). Signed to Stolen Recordings. Who? Stolen. Come on. Keep up. "Stolen have been good to us. They've given us massive mental support, letting us stay at their house, helping out wherever they can, encouraging us...impetus." Stolen have a strong aesthetic, right? "They only go for what they like, rather than what

they think will be profitable." "There's a word for that, isn't there?" "Yeah, integrity."

Do you all have day jobs? "No, no." "We're destitute. At least, I am." Do you live with your parents? "I have a girlfriend who supports me." "Our parents are seriously understanding and supportive. We told them that one day it would pay off, so we have to follow through." "We'll have a yacht one day – a model yacht."

Convinced yet? Don't listen to me, don't listen to me, please don't listen to me. Go online, check out their music, check out their videos, check out the merchandise – and while you're there, don't forget to ground yourself, earth yourself, keep in touch because seriously this music makes my brain feel like it's swimming in stratospheres, it's so ebullient and passionate and melodic and – hell yes – it

reminds me so much of my secret crushes of the Eighties, Snapper, The Chills, Straitjacket Fits and all their kind.

What comparisons have you had? "Lots of wrong ones." "We got compared to The Proclaimers because two people wear glasses." "Velvet Underground and Jonathan Richman... Pixies." "Our influences are very mixed up, because there are so many songwriters."

How did you record the album? "Microphones, cables..." Did you view it as an album or a collection of songs? "It's not a concept album." It does seem like you've got a concept going on: get out of bed (song one), put your socks on (song two)... Maybe it's a subtle thing about how we can get through the day. "These themes are what we want from life: there must be a lot of sleeping, cos we all love our beds."

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Keeping it Surreal

Brace yourself for the return of **Les Savy Fav**, back with a triumphant new album of haywire riffs and perverse pop – along with further tales of locusts, vintage porn and how not to make a stage outfit...

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Photography: **Pat Graham**



Tim Harrington leans back on a metal folding chair, crazed gesticulations possessing his hands, midway through the latest in a series of unlikely tales. His eyes are wild, like his thick, curling-at-the-edges brown beard, or his bedhead-of-all-bedheads blonde hair. His monkish frame clad in pastel shades, he looks like a missing character from *Caddyshack* – Rodney Dangerfield's gregarious and gently-unhinged boho art-punk sidekick perhaps – who ended up on the cutting room floor. Right now, he's talking about Locusts.

"Do you get locusts here? They appear, like, once every eight or 13 years – you see 'em, clinging to the trunks of trees – and they eat everything in sight... I've been a locust," he grins.

You have?

"Yeah, for a Public Service Announcement in the States. They made me this cool costume and filmed me hassling people, stealing food, getting in their faces. Then the voiceover comes: 'In America, locusts are *annoying*. In Africa, they're *KILLERS!*'"

"It was such a cool costume, I really *looked* like a locust! I wanted to keep it, but when I mentioned this to the production company, they started talking about me taking the costume in lieu of my fee. And I wanted to get paid." He sighs. "It was fitted for me, and everything."

Were I a lesser writer, I would now be drawing a painful parallel between the locust, one of nature's hardiest tiny beasties, and Les Savy Fav, the group with whom Tim has howled, cantered and caterwauled for 12 or so years now. After all, the group have pursued a singular, solitary path through underground rock for that decade-end-change, evading trends and scenes while making a twisted, flailing, melodic and concise noise all their own. Always eager to ditch a bandwagon at the earliest occasion, they went on 'hiatus' earlier in the decade, just as the New York art-punk scene they'd helped pioneer started to explode.

"I guess it all started to feel like a *career*," says Syd Butler, bassist and honcho of French Kiss Records, the label the group have released their music on since second album, 1999's *The Cat And The Cobra*. "We never wanted it to feel like that. We wanted to make the music for its own sake."

"We had other ambitions we wanted to fulfil," adds Tim. "Syd wanted to concentrate on the label, I wanted to focus on design for a while... I basically didn't want to end up a Successful 40 Year Old Rock Star and feel like I'd wasted my life, y'know?" he laughs. "Sitting there by my pool, thinking, 'I wish I'd pursued my passion for design'. Seriously, I've always had nothing but respect for professional musicians, people who play music and make their living from it their whole lives. But we wanted to do other things, too."

The hiatus was signalled by drummer Harrison Haynes' move away from New York, but has – as the group's excellent new album, *Let's Stay Friends*, and a triumphant appearance at this year's ATP vs The Fans attest – proved temporary, the lure of Les Savy Fav proving irresistible. As well it might; the stage is certainly somewhere Tim Harrington belongs.

I still remember the first time I saw Les Savy Fav, at London's 93 Feet East, 13 February 2001. The date sticks in my mind, because...

"It was Valentine's Eve," interrupts Tim. "Y'know, how All Hallows' Day, Saint's Day, is preceded by this messed up holiday, Hallowe'en? I thought Valentine's Day could do with a similar event the night before, turning it all upside down. Valentine's Eve."

According with this new tradition, Tim garlanded the cavernous venue in hearts he'd fashioned from the pages of the hardest-core pornography. To accent the evening, if you will.

"I'm a renowned collector of vintage niche pornography," interjects Tim. "In New York, I'm

like the only guy who has a complete collection of original editions of *Oui* magazine, 1972-1981, in mint condition. And also *Leg Work*, which is a harder magazine to collect. There are all these extra editions, *Leg Work Black*, *Leg Work Latina*..."

While the three musicians in Les Savy Fav skulked purposefully in the shadows, stirring up a noise of slaloming, jagged, haywire riffs and neon blasts of perverse pop, Tim took to entertaining his audience. First, he was tearing porno-hearts from the walls, forcing his tongue through paper vaginas. Next, he was climbing the amps and clumsily clambering onto a huge speaker suspended from the ceiling by girders and steel chains, swinging it violently as he sang, a good 15 feet above the ground. Finally, he returned to the stage, dismantling the drum kit and walking off with a side-tom which he proceeded to beat, like some deranged leprechaun drum-major, while leaping into the audience and completing a circuit of the auditorium. It was, however, just another abnormal night for Les Savy Fav.

"It's like a kind of surrealism, being an adjunct of the music," explains Tim, of his onstage performance. "A lot of it is improvised – the songs have their sections, but they'll extend them or shorten them, keep it fresh, different. And all the

The members of Les Savy Fav met just over a decade ago, while studying at Rhode Island School of Art, an institution heavy with punk rock kudos. "Talking Heads were from there," nods Tim. "Lightning Bolt also. We played our first shows with those guys in the audience. I was born in New Jersey. I loved it there, but from the age of 10 or 11, I knew that I wanted to go to art college."

This artistic bent continues through Les Savy Fav, not just from the disjointed twists and conceptual swipes of their records, but also in the design of T-shirts and album sleeves. Their debut LP, 1997's *3/5*, saw the disk contained within the packaging of a shower cap. They want every show, every release, not just to be the latest in a stream of product, but special in and of itself; this is why they've absented themselves from the indie-rock treadmill, in favour of doing their thing at a pace that suits them. The Game is not one they want to play.

"I worked at a major label for a year," offers Syd. "It was sickening, guys in the A&R department receiving insane pay-packets and doing nothing. As the owner of a small record label, I can say that the industry is fucked. Especially thanks to the internet, there's a generation of kids who have no problem with stealing music, who think its OK..."

'As I made for the stage, I realised I hadn't cut any eyeholes in the dog costume...'

stuff I do, it's all part of the same thing. So every show's different, we don't ever fall into a rut and it stays interesting, for us and for the audience. We want every show to be special."

What's the wildest it's gotten?

"Oh, there are so many stories... There was this one time, some friends gave me this huge plush toy dog they found in a thrift store. It was as long as I was tall, so I cut it open and pulled all the stuffing out. The next night, the band started playing, and I got inside the dog, like it were a costume, all ready to run onstage. But things started to go wrong – the guitars were out of tune, it wasn't quite happening. And as I made for the stage, I realised I hadn't cut any eyeholes in the dog costume, and ended up stumbling over. It wasn't good. We kind of cooled off on costumes after that show."

"We set up an 'honesty jar' on the merch table on our last tour," smiles Tim. "'If you downloaded our album for free, please donate'. We got some money!"

It's the small victories that keep you going, and Les Savy Fav keep going. *Let's Stay Friends* opens with 'Pots And Pans', an anthemic ode to a group who "*made a noise no one could stand*", but who play anyway. It's about standing up and making your own noise, your own art, to express "*a human heart that's nowhere near its end*". Tim blushes a little when I ask if the lyrics are autobiographical.

"I played the song to a friend who worked on the album, saying, 'The words are just kind of a joke, about this imaginary band'. And he listened to it, and he said, 'Uh, no they're not'. And you know what?" he grins. "I guess they're not."





lost and found

Words: **Frances Morgan**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

"For better or for worse, when you put on one of my records, you're getting me," says Robert Wyatt. *Plan B* was only too happy to spend an afternoon in the company of the reluctantly iconic songwriter – and his bewilderingly beautiful new album, *Comicipera*

"About 10 minutes ago I said, you've probably got some questions," says Robert Wyatt. "And then I kept talking. Look, go through your questions. Eat. Eat and drink and smoke," he urges, proffering a light and some cake. "Otherwise, life, you know, just dries up..."

I'm fine with the latter three. Cup of tea, Drum Mild, a Danish pastry with custard in it. I'm fine sitting in a light front room full of *stuff* – instruments, records, pictures – and talking about Cecil Taylor and William Parker. Maybe we could just do that. I could do that all day, probably. It's what I do a lot anyway. Talk, smoke, listen, talk some more; the outside world driving around doing whatever it is it does on the other side of the curtains.

But the room I'm in belongs to Robert Wyatt, and I'm here to talk to him about his new album, *Comicipera*. I've travelled to Louth, in Lincolnshire, by train and replacement bus and a drive through big-skied cloud-blown countryside with Wyatt's wife, artist and writer Alfreda Bengé, who says right away she's glad that photographer Simon Fernandez and I are smokers. This is a relief to me too because, throughout the journey, I've veered between making conscientious, illegible notes, gazing camera-eyed at an unfamiliar part of England, and getting nervous to the point of missing I'd wished the train this morning, and I could do with a fag. I don't think the weight of expectation has ever sat upon my head with quite such ominous heft as it has today.

Of course, the expectation budges as soon as I'm welcomed into Wyatt's room, greeted with an enormous smile and the offer of a cuppa from an instantly recognisable voice – a voice that, when singing, seems full of quiet concern for or knowledge of its listeners.

To be honest, that weight of expectation dissipates whenever I actually hear Wyatt's music, which is why I'm here in the first place. From the playful art rock of his early bands Soft Machine and Matching Mole, through 1974's revelatory, harrowing solo album *Rock Bottom* and the early Eighties singles that further defined his sweet, weird, drifting, impressionistic, committed and heartfelt free-pop, to the meditative and eclectic *Shleep* of 1997, and beyond, Robert's Wyatt's music asks a lot of the listener, but does not *demand*. Rather, it suggests, via dreamlike timbres, open chords, gentle percussion and an almost unbearable emotional honesty, nothing less than the map of a human spirit, sketched out in sound. But what that means is, it's music that means so much to so many people, in a quiet private way that they hold close to themselves. I'm one of those people, too, so I don't want to let us down.

So I gesture at my notes.

Yeah, I wrote some questions. I find asking them quite difficult.

"Just give it a go. I'm on your side, do you know what I mean? It's your gig now. I've done my gig, I've made my fucking record."

All right, we'll talk about the record to start with. Tell me some stuff.

"Playing it back I realised that I do play very loud cymbals all the time..." Wyatt reflects, referring to the ripply, brittle scatters of cymbal that have punctuated his percussion since his early days as a jazz drummer. "I won't abandon what I do just to be fashionable, so I keep going 'Tssh! Tssh! Tssh!'. I feel a bit embarrassed sometimes that I'm drowning out all these wonderful musicians with my splashy cymbal noises."

That wasn't the first thing I would have noticed about the album.

"Thank you. But I just listen to it and get so embarrassed. It's like old people who get hairs growing out of their faces in weird places and you're having a conversation with them and thinking, 'Fucking hell, he's got a black hair growing out of his nose'... But no, it's just weird stuff," he laughs, describing the record's mood, or possibly his own on listening to it: "'I'm lost, I'm somewhere. But wherever that is, that's here'. The first track does it on this record. Thank you, Anja Garbarek, for writing it."

Comicipera's opener, 'Stay Tuned', is a slow-burning, beautifully simple tilt between uncertainty

album in three discrete parts, 'acts', but I'd argue you could listen to it without knowing that. You would, however, notice how it deepens and changes: locationally, from domestic/internal to a confusing but familiar outside, to – suddenly and devastatingly – a world beset by conflict and chaos and thence back inside again into a rich, almost desperate imagination. Sonically, you'll hear the familiar washes of plangent chord and lilting, patch-worked songwriting pick up speed into quirky, rhythmic energy, into an electronically charged, almost apocalyptic peak with the devastating, Eno-enhanced 'Out Of The Blue'. The album's final section knits together songs in Italian and Spanish with loose, multicoloured arrangements of free jazz vibraphone, minimalist synth, distant trumpet, and all around a spaciousness that recalls, if anything, bands of the Brazilian Tropicalia movement, whose psychedelic bossa nova whimsy masked deeper metaphysical concerns and a wry, committed criticism of the status quo.

But at every signpost, there's a derailment or a surprise: with Wyatt, consistent as his vocal presence remains, the unexpected is, you feel, central to every song. 'Just As You Are', at first listen a soft love song, taps into the compromises,

'I always work backwards from chaos into order'

and surety. The questioning verses – "*In between, lost in noise, somewhere, somewhere, somewhere*" – settle into encouragement and resolution, steady bass bolstered by trombone and trumpet: "*Don't start searching, I'll get back to you.*"

You mean that state of not really being sure where you are, but being OK with that?

"Yeah, thank you for saying that. You've pinned it down exactly."

That sense of drift in your music is one of the things I like most about it.

"My physical response to what I'm doing is... Once I start making noise it's a bit like jumping into water and sometimes I'm in a pond, which I would call a pop song, and sometimes I think, 'Oh fucking hell, this isn't a pond, this is the ocean'. I'm somewhere bigger than a pond, and it gets a bit more scary."

Is that something that you can't really plan?

"You cannot plan it. If you do, you're being a cynical media bastard and it will always show up."

signposts to somewhere

In a roundabout way, this is how we talk about *Comicipera*, an album that's both immediate and a bit unfathomable, like all Wyatt's records. It is an

co-dependency and insecurity present in every relationship. The loping, lush 'Beautiful War', turns around and strangles you when the subject matter comes clear: its airiness is the methodical efficiency of a bomber destroying an anonymous settlement far below, safe in his cloudless sky. The stately, waltz-like 'Cancon de Julieta' fragments into the call-and-answer swoops of Chucho Merchan's bass violin and a weird noise undertow that befits its setting of Garcia Lorca's words.

Wyatt's previous album, 2003's *Cuckooland*, navigated a similar journey between familiar and alien; internal and political – like *Comicipera*, songs gently whisked you from wry ontological questioning to cinematic evocations of 'Old Europe', from drifting, legato laments to jazzy scuttle. *Comicipera* is wider in frame, somehow; delirious with ideas, but with a settled assuredness of vision. How did it all come together? Did the structure come before or after the songs?

"It came out of the process. Things separate into chunks of preoccupation. I'm sort of floating about all the time, and it's quite disparate and quite chaotic. And then when I've got an hour and a half's worth I gather it together, then I sort it out in terms of what state of mind I was in when I wrote this



song or that song, or nicked somebody else's song, or stopped singing altogether and let someone else play their instrument. Because I get bored, you know, of my voice sometimes. Anyway, then you sort it all out, and in this case it fell into three sort of categories, really.

"I'm on an animal level, using instinct most of the time, which is what I like most. But let's sort it out, help the listener here a bit. Cut it up a bit. This is one train of thought, that's another. It turned out it took three trains of thought."

It's a weird listen. You start off feeling quite safe but then as it goes on it starts to become a much darker record. It's quite disorientating.

"It's just that, having got past 60, I've done all the business of trying to tailor things to what people can digest. You get quite selfish at this age. You just think, 'I've got one last go, possibly, so I'm just going to throw it out the way it happens'.

"What I do remember is that youth always anticipates death as quite a dramatic, black and white thing. They romanticise it, and simplify it and cut it down. But it's a weirder and stranger journey. You start off, and you know roughly what's going on. Even if it's strange for you it's marked out. You become a teenager and think, 'OK, there's sex'.

Then you get a job, and you think, that's adulthood and you've got there, to a sort of plateau. But then you could have another 20, 30, 40, 50 years of 'what then?' Then you're in danger and in the wilderness, much more than teenagers ever understand about wilderness – they fantasise about 'weird', but they have no idea what weird really is. *Weird is really fucking weird.*

"When you're 50, life is just as unknown to you and unliveable, difficult and strange, as it is for a 12 year old. But then, I say all that stuff which sounds really pretentious, but all I've tried to do is make a really nice record. I've tried to string nice notes together. And if somebody's got any patience they will hear them. I don't put the beats in to help, I just say 'Look, the notes are there, believe me. Trust me, I've got a beard. How can you not trust me?'"

I don't know if I trust beards...

"No, well, I would never play a record with a person with a beard on the front, other than myself. This is why Alfie never, ever does album covers with me on the front, because it would put everybody right off."

Ever since I first heard it, I've found your music very comforting, even when it sounds

unsure or sad or critical. But with this new album I feel more than ever this sense of you looking at the awfulness of things.

"If it's a bit distressing where I go, hang on in there because it's quite friendly in the end. I've just tried not to avoid the nastiness, but say that although the nastiness is unbelievable, it's not unbearable. That's what I hope. I would hope that in the end it would be some kind of comfort because god, there's just so much pain. But you've got to dig a bit deeper, not to come on all serious, but just to provide any comfort at all. Beyond the immediate comforts of orgasm and getting pissed and loud music and stuff. Life lasts longer than all those three events, which are crucial, but there's got to be a deep fun going on as well that survives all the tragedy."

In some ways I'm looking forward to getting older, getting past a lot of that stuff.

"I'll tell you, it's a lot to look forward to. It's really nice. It's kind of like climbing up the slippery bits out of an ocean and getting up to dry bits, and looking down into the valley you just crawled from of teeming activity and agony and sleepless nights and all the awful, well, wonderful things. Both. It's really nice. You think, wow, I've been

allowed to live long enough to have a look at what's been going on in my lifetime. It's a great privilege."

I didn't mean to bring up the comfort thing so soon in the interview. It felt a little creepy somehow; a little too familial. But what the hell: many of my generation are at odds with the idea of family, at odds with the media and government's current idealised view of love and domestic life, but also unsure about the countercultural values our own parents might or might not have tried to live up to, all at sea as to how and when and where we'll find our real homes and real connections. It is easier to look for the idea of 'family', of closeness, outside our own, and some of us find it in music, of course.

If we feel rootless, songs like Robert Wyatt's (all at once steadfast and sharp, yet fragile and ambiguous) give us some tentative roots. While I am sure he'd laugh, embarrassed, at such a notion, there are people my age to whom his tremulous, conversational croon has an oddly mentor-like quality, a cipher for their own feelings about vulnerability, independence, where to put themselves in this world.

But let's not get too sentimental here. This is music we're talking about, and much of the reassuring quality of Wyatt's music derives, paradoxically, from his removal of himself from the songwriting process and his ability to set the listener afloat in sound. Even when his lyrics are heavy on the polemic, there's something sonically *selfless* about the way he approaches the idea of the song, which often emerges from shifting sands of resolved and unresolved melody as if you've unearthed it yourself. And this fluidity, this oceanic quality that's reflected in the timbres he works with, reassures by its assurance that some things are bigger than you – and all you can do is cast yourself adrift in them.

dots and loops

Really, there's only one thing I came here to ask, and that's how Robert Wyatt makes such music.

So I do. And he scoots around the room, energised, demonstrating, sounding out notes on piano, trumpet and voice. "It's very, very simple how I work. I've got a room here; four walls like anybody else's and a door going through to where I make tea. Facing me is a CD player and a cassette recorder. On the left of the mixer is an eight-track recording machine. Right in front of me I can look out onto the car park and watch people driving into town and people driving out. On my right, I've got a baby grand piano. On the right of that there's a disused fireplace, and then I'll take you back to where we started; about a thousand vinyl LPs and some photos of my wife, including one of her smacking her previous husband in the face, just as a kind of warning to me. Look at that! That's actually from a film, two stills. That's Alfie when she was a little girl. And that's her now.

"This is where I work. I just had to cut music down to very simple things. There are beats in my stuff, it's just that they're buried. There's a grid, in other words. I'm very old-fashioned. I want a beat and a tune. There are two kinds of music really, there's music to dance to and music to sing. You can have singing music, which has no beat. You can have dance music which has no tune. The intriguing exercise which I've embarked on for the last 50 years is to try and combine the two. I think, if I've made mistakes, I've erred on the side of tune, and let the beat be buried a bit; like the skeleton of a fish. It's there, but it doesn't look like a great bony animal.

"Then I work out the piano. About *there* I can hit it with my voice." He strikes a key. "Now, 20 years ago I could get up to *there*, but I can't anymore, so I have to do all that stuff on something else; trumpet, or something like that. So, that's notes. Then, I've got this metronome, which is fantastic;

it's Victorian, I think. Now then, that metronome is a wonderful thing. It doesn't even rock steady, and there's a track on the new album where this is the only rhythm section, the one about 'Hattie in the attic' [AWOL]. That's all I used. That's the drumkit. So, I've got a beat, and the notes, and the trumpet, and then I've got heaps and heaps of bits of paper with words on...and I just try and stick them all together, my dear; that's all I do."

Do you do it every day?

"I play trumpet every day."

Do you write words every day?

"There I hit the buffers, because words and music don't always fit. The bit where you think about words is a whole different bit of your brain. It's that lovely transition zone between words and music that's got some sort of biological roots in humans. I don't know enough about human biology to know what the link is."

Is it about finding a balance between what you want to say and the musical words that will say it?

"Well, I actually think that way round, and I write more than I sing, because mostly what I write, I write. That's the form it takes. With music, I don't start with words; I start with noise, with sound. If it turns into words then I've struck lucky. You can't force it, though.

"I only make one LP about every five years because of that. It's not that I only have that many ideas. You've got to be so lucky. It's like panning for gold: every day you stick your thing in the water and drag up a bit of mud and leaf through it. Occasionally you pick something out and you think, 'Oh, that's really nice. There's a bit of mineral

there'. You put it in your bag to take home, and music's like that. Fishing about among all the notes and occasionally one will turn into a word or a phrase, and then you'll take it home.

"Singing and talking aren't the same thing. They absolutely are not. I remember a dreadful moment at a friend's house about five years ago. A bloke pulled out his guitar and Alfie rushed into the kitchen saying, 'Oh no, he's going to sing a song, it's going to kill the conversation dead! We're going to have to sit and listen to him now.' He started singing some ballad and you could see everyone's metabolism slowing down. It's an awfully cruel thing to say, but people when they're singing gentle ballads think they're being gentle, but they're being quite interventionist, actually."

They're forcing you to enter their world.

"It's that kind of ersatz church mode. I much prefer making records to live gigs now, for that reason, because I don't want anyone to listen to me when they don't have to, or don't want to."

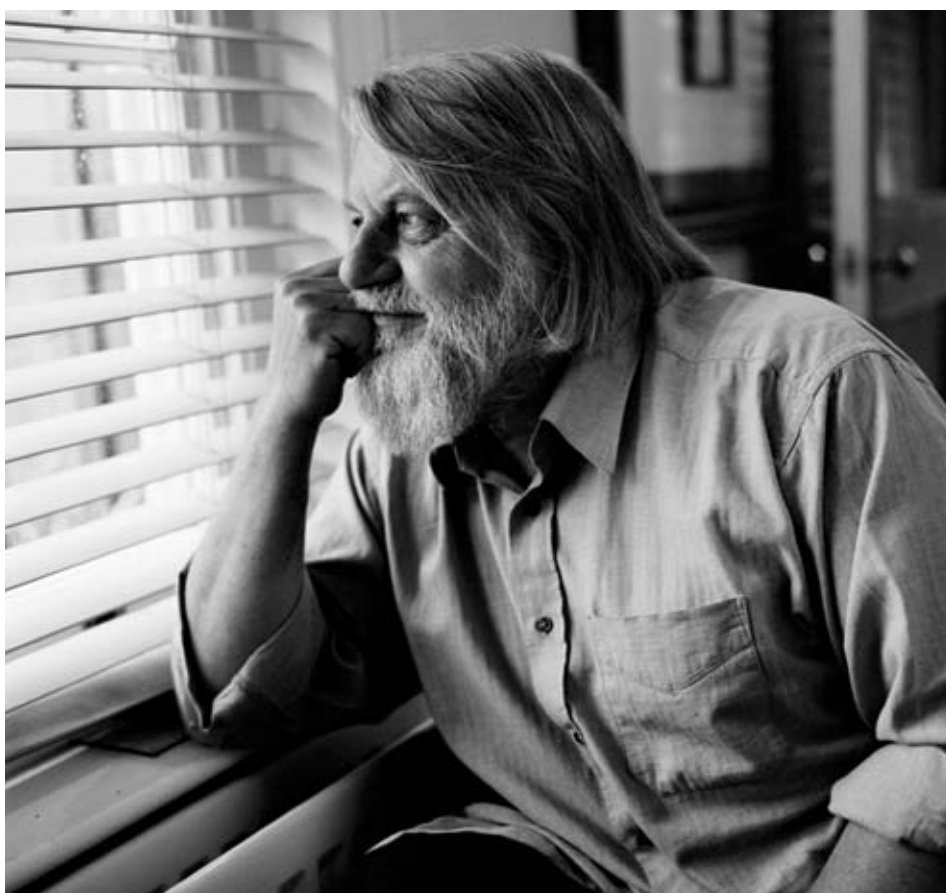
So you don't like the idea of reverence...

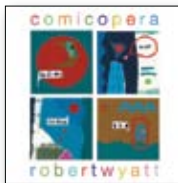
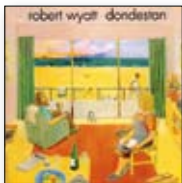
"I think it's appalling."

Do you still improvise with people?

"Yeah, I do a lot. In fact, even on my records I do. Most people start with the notes, and the beats, and fix which ones are going to work and expand on it. I tend to work backwards in a way. My brain is sort of a cross between Oxford Circus and a Cecil Taylor concert. Then I just keep cutting stuff out until I'm left with a followable thread – reduce it right down to a few words or a few notes. To me, songwriting is incidental to making music. What I'm trying to do is make *records* and I want them to be complete meals; vitamins, proteins, trace elements, the lot.

'You're a folk musician representing an unknown tribe, of which there may be no other members'





songs in the key of life: ten wyatt classics

Little Red Riding Hood Hit The Road

(from *Rock Bottom*, 1974)

Spirited free jazz with reversed trumpet, giving way to spellbinding song with fabulously shifting chords.

Maryan (from *Shleep*, 1997)

More water imagery in a song whose dreamlike melody meanders along icy tributaries. Mesmerised, we drown therein.

Signed Curtain (from *Matching Mole's Matching Mole*, 1972)

A resigned sigh of a song that feels like it's being made up ad hoc, yet whose very

lethargy and inherent humour belie a lively human heart.

Moon In June (from *Soft Machine's Third*, 1970)

Hotwire into young Wyatt's brain and sample the psychotropic delights of his playful Canterbury art-rock band; become a medieval child without the pestilence for a hazy 19 minutes.

Left On Man (from *Dondeston*, 1991)

Ten years before Bush threw down the gauntlet, to question the cost of "What we call freedom in the north" still met with

disapproval from one's compatriots, so this song still stands.

Sea Song (from *Rock Bottom*, 1974)

All top tens of Robert Wyatt ever listed will include this song for the simple reason that it is one of the best songs in the world.

Alifib/Alife (from *Rock Bottom*, 1974)

Nonsense love-songs are rare but this one is a treat and homage to Wyatt's creative partner and 'other half'.

Lullaby For Hamza (from *Cuckooland*, 2003)

Hamza was born during the onset of the Gulf War in 1991 – the bombing campaigns and climate of fear have left indelible scars on many children.

Beautiful Peace (from *Comicopera*, 2007)

Wittily illustrates the acceptance of the banal and the turning of a blind eye towards ugliness in English towns and attitudes.

Pigs... (In There) (from *EPs 1999*)

Without resorting to a preachy approach to animal rights, Wyatt's naïve yet incredulous repetition of "Pigs...? In THERE?" says it all. **Crayola Lectern**

"But I always work backwards from chaos into order. That's really the only thing I do that's totally not jazz and it's totally...well, I haven't learnt that from anybody. That's just the way I work."

It's probably an accumulation of all the music you've listened to.

"Yes, there's just an overwhelming amount of stuff that you can't deny or chuck in the bin, and it's irreconcilable so you just have to let it ferment in your brain, and then your brain will inevitably – because you're only one little pathetic person – will reduce it down to the things that work for you and keep pushing everything else away and you're left with the utter simplicity of a Buddy Holly song – or you're left back with actually being a kind of folk musician representing an unknown tribe, of which there may be no other members! Just your own little one-person tribe."

You know, you've probably summed up there one of the best reasons I can think of to make music.

significant others

The most obvious, and pleasurable, evidence of Wyatt's eschewal of singer-songwriter egotism is the long-standing relationship he has with collaborating musicians – from rock notables like Paul Weller and Brian Eno, to jazz musicians such as trombonist Annie Whitehead, vocalist Karen Mantler, percussionist Orphy Robinson and loads more. It's not unusual that an admired musician should be able to cherry-pick others to work with them, but Wyatt's collaborative recordings stand out through giving the impression, always, of real musical dialogues, necessary and organic. *Comicoopera* marshals a large cast that feels particularly able to draw Wyatt's compositions in odd, exuberant and atmospheric directions.

"I've given up working with people I don't like," he says. "I used to, because I thought they were really brilliant or clever, but I can't be bothered with that anymore. Because in the end, musically it's better – people open out. There's this illusion that confrontation brings out stuff that's exciting, like on *Big Brother* – no it doesn't. It's sort of all right, but you get further and deeper with empathy."

When Wyatt asked singer Seaming To, who provides the soprano vocal on *Comicoopera*'s 'Stay Tuned', to add clarinet, "She said, 'I haven't played the clarinet for a while', and I said, 'Look, it's not fucking Mozart, it's just a few notes'. I thought she did lovely on it. I know I could look through the Musicians' Union phonebook and get brilliant clarinetists, but I wanted someone I could connect with as a human being."

I get the impression you're open to people having their own take on your songs.

"Absolutely. I don't tell them what to play. The buck stops with me when I'm editing. They know that. So it's not in that sense a free-for-all. I will take responsibility for the end result, which is arrogant but also I don't want them to get the blame for the wrong notes. It's got to stop somewhere, because when you listen to a record it's partly for sound, but also for company. You want some kind of coherent sense of another person in the room when you play a record. So for better or for worse when you put on one of my records you're getting me. I get all the help I can to make it sound good."

Do you feel like you learn a lot from your collaborators?

"I couldn't do without them. I left school at 16 and I can't really read music. I rely on people like [saxophonist] Gilad Atzom and [bassist] Yaron Stavi and Annie Whitehead, who are fantastically well-schooled musicians, to hear what I'm doing and make coherent sense of it. I'm not really an individualist."

Wyatt's most significant collaborator, though, must be his wife, Alfie. As well as writing a great

many of the lyrics to his songs, her paintings and collages have been the visual representation of Wyatt's music over the past few decades, and are almost inseparable from its sound.

Like Wyatt's songs, her designs are deceptively simple, their bright colours and irregular shapes belying a complex fluidity. What I regret most about this day spent with both of them is that I didn't record the conversation Alfie and I had on our drive back, an exchange about writing, feminism, war and families – and probably most of all, how lyrics and music work together. I remember it, though. It was great.

Do you tell her what you want her to do with the artwork?

"I wouldn't say a word. I let her get on with it. She knows what the songs are about because she wrote half of them. I know from doing stuff myself I don't need someone looking over my shoulder. I can get there myself, otherwise it's not a journey. I don't always know what's going in Alfie's head."

Do you ever disagree?

"I never disagree with Alfie."

Some of Bengé's most moving lyrics on *Comicoopera* are those of 'Out Of The Blue', which was provoked by the Israeli bombing of Lebanon last year. Focusing in on the domestic, it tries to express the sheer sudden horror of a house – a simple, safe place – destroyed by an anonymous enemy. Wyatt's turning to other languages for the remainder of the album after this is no coincidence.

"It's after the line, '*You have planted everlasting hatred in my heart*'. It follows a woman whose house has been bombed to bits by some clever dick in an aeroplane – 'You've come to my door

much further...when I try and catch up with words it's sort of a bit clumsy..."

He picks up a weathered-looking brass instrument.

"Annie Whitehead, who plays trombone on the record, on the fourth track of the album ['AWOL'] she plays this. Alfie got it in a car boot sale. It's got the wrong mouthpiece on it. It's called a baritone horn. I tried to play it, but I can't fix the notes! The reason I mention that is because I said to Annie, 'I'm having trouble with Concert B – how do you hit that?' And she said, 'Robert, there's no short cut.' Annie's been practising hours a day for 40 years, and she was politely telling me there were some things you just can't get to straight away." He laughs: "There's no short cut to a low Concert B."

free will and testament

Do people still ask you a lot about your politics?

"It still comes up a lot. The moment I joined the Communist Party I knew it was something I'd have to deal with for the rest of my life and it would be a real obstacle for some people, a point of interest for others or a point of contempt for others."

How do you feel about it now?

"I'm always nervous about sounding like Cliff Richard talking about his Christianity, but it's just that I personally have found a way of understanding the world that makes sense to me and I get more sheer intelligence – applicable ways of looking at the world – than I do from Marxists than I do from religion as the world is commonly used. I do see the power shifts and politics in the world in terms of

'I'm not a wise old man. I can think, I can think, I can think, and then I just get stuck'

but you've blown it apart, so you might as well come in through the roof or the ceiling. You've fucked up my house – fuck you. There's nothing I can do, I haven't got a bombing aeroplane myself.' What do you do? What Palestinian women do is they do encourage their sons to and fight back, but of course that leads to more tragedy. But at the same time you can't just wipe people out by bombing them.

"Alfie was reflecting on the cycle of violence, where you may not intrinsically feel violent, but if great violence is done to you then one of the responses is to be violent back, and it's the point at which all these philosophies about trying to be nice just collapse in the face of that excessive rape of a soul. And I'm just not clever enough to know what to do next, so I just sang in foreign languages and did a bit of free jazz..."

Did you feel like there was nothing you could say?

"I just felt completely ill-equipped to come up with an appropriate response. So then I do what artists do, which is drift off into some kind of fairytale. The whole last section of the record is about trying on different alien guises: foreign language or a revolutionary rhetoric or a bit of free jazz, Orphy Robinson on vibes going bonkers, or surrealist dream-world stuff. I just turn back to my original craft, which is to try and make a nice sequence of notes that don't ignore reality. It sounds so pathetic. I'm not a wise old man. I can think, I can think, I can think, and then I just get stuck."

"I can't compete intellectually in words with where I've got to musically. I do feel like I've got

military and economic power. Not in terms of an answer, but just an understanding of the process as we're living through it. That's all I'd say about it."

Would you say all your music is political?

"I would go further than that. I would say I'm more consistently a political animal than I am a musical one. In other words, who I am and the privileges I have come from political reality. And the fact that I've chosen to be a musician out of the various occupations I could do is sort of secondary, actually, to me. I love music. But I did anyway, long before I was a musician. As a teenager, music saved my life. But as a teenager I thought I'd be a painter."

"Thank god for rock music for one thing: that it went back to basics. Rock music is about a return to folk music. You don't have to know anything. You just have to get an instrument in your hand that plays a note, and sing, and anyone can do it."

"I started out from there. I was really grateful, because in the Fifties when I was listening to jazz or Stravinsky or something, it didn't occur to me that I'd ever be able to play it. There's no short cut to that stuff. But with rock 'n' roll there is a short cut – you just sort of...do it. So that's what I latched onto. First of all, it wasn't very philosophical, it was more like, how do you get to dances, and one way was being the drummer. So that sort of thing – very simple."

Is it still very simple?

"It has to be. Any information I get, I try to take it all on, but in terms of processing it, I have to reduce everything back to all those teenage things – is there a beat somewhere, is there a tune somewhere? That sort of thing."

He pauses.

"Are you hungry? You must be hungry."



SOLDIER OF THE HEART

As she releases her fourth album, *This Fool Can Die Now*, our favourite lo-fi sorceress **Scout Niblett** talks *Plan B* through its necromantic narratives, and tells us how she fights her battles – with love, faith, magic and feedback

Words: **Ringo P Stacey**

Photography: **Cat Stevens**

Miss Emma 'Scout' Niblett is giving up smoking. I know that, cos I read it on her blog. Around the time I was rooting through her old albums, trying to work out how she got from there to here, today, giving up smoking...some time in the future. We roll fags and discuss tactics for the next attempt: which helps more, gum or patches; how we smoke when we're alone working; and how her last attempt lasted three days before her boyfriend lost patience with her temper and ordered her back on the cigs.

We've discussed the new album, *This Fool Can Die Now*, and I've changed my mind about it again. Initially, I wasn't sure I liked it, couldn't get past the first couple of songs and the Marilyn Monroe cover, then I thought it was good, and now I'm mumbling in barely coherent awe. Not that it's better than I thought it was – it still ebbs and flows through giddy heights and more tranquil lows – but now it makes sense. Now I feel I have to listen as presented, in strict numerical order.

But that's not where I chose to start. First, I struck for the nauseous centre where Scout is fierce and troubled, screaming about death and casting spells on her lover over that monolithic geetar crunch and whine. Where's she's deranged and ready to eat you alive. The stuff that sounds like her last album, *Kidnapped By Neptune*. The stuff my arrested personality could appreciate most. The twin sock of 'Let Thine Heart Be Warmed' and 'Your Last Chariot' – the first a witch's chant sending love to her absent sweetheart, the second a promise and threat. "Coming to get you, coming to get you, coming to get you", Scout drawls, "you" becoming "yaaaaeeuuwww" in a manner not unlike Kate Bush's dive through "unbelieeevable" in 'Wow'.

I tell her it's kind of scary and she pauses for a second. "OK," she starts, and I'm not sure if she's excited because she's got something she just has to let out or is embarrassed by what it is. "That's interesting, because I wrote that from the perspective of death. Not as a lover."

So the drawl is death stalking his victim?

"I started writing it as a song for a person," she admits. "Like a loving song. Although it's not very loving. Then it started changing into a song about death coming. It could be interchangeable."

your beat kicks back like death

And that's where I was drawn in. I didn't seek her out: she was playing on the office radio and piqued my interest in a way I hadn't expected that kind of music could anymore. Cos I didn't just hear echoes of all the hot-headed punks I'd loved as a kid – yer

PJ Harveys (way before the piano) and yer Throwing Muses. I heard a unique or series of characters more real in their storytelling than any autobiography.

Scout Niblett doesn't quit, isn't too inhibited to let herself go and ride the moment. That's what I thought, and that's what I found, searching back. Through 2000's wary *Sweetheart Fever*, which never got as feverish as the title demanded. Past the naïve stylings of 2003's charming *I Am*, the one I first heard accidentally, my ears caught by the whizzpopping dynamics of 'I'll Be A Prince (Shhhh)' and lo-fi bathroom ambience of 'Fire Flies'. Here was an aesthetic built not on the pretence of gutter chic that lo-fi became, but on the forces which originally birthed the genre: chance, acceptance and honesty.

To the joyous screams of 2005's *Kidnapped By Neptune*, our hero playing hot with her whims

And what were you doing?

"I've no idea."

There's one line I can't make out, something like "This is my world so..."

She corrects, "This is my will. Like, 'This is my will, so mote it be'."

Mote it be?

"Yeah, it's a magical sentence. They use it in magic when a spell ends. It's like, 'This is my intention, so let it happen'."

So it's you casting a spell on your lover?

"I'm willing for someone to be warned by my love. It's not for them to love me back, but for them to feel love from me. That's a good wish, isn't it?"

Yeah. It's nurturing rather than...

"...trying to control someone."

Or trying to kill them.

'I have a real attraction to medieval music...It's the courtly thing, and the chivalry. I honestly think I was around then, in some way'

and the bunch of riffs Nirvana borrowed off The Breeders borrowed off Hüsker Dü back in 1988. The riffs were topped off by optimistic hollers, like the chorus of 'Lullaby For Scout In 10 Years': "Honey! If you're still around, I'll be around".

Not now. If 'Your Last Chariot' bears a superficial resemblance to the above, its spirit is cooked up from more anguished ingredients: love and death; the roar of the pit. And over those chords played confident like usually only Americans know how there's a woman with a thousand accents on the verge of insane thoughts, her Brummie twang lending menace to the syllables dribbling out her mouth. Likewise, 'Let Thine Heart Be Warmed', is another gift which sounds like a threat. You will be warmed; you have no choice.

Why is it 'Let Thine Heart Be Warmed' and not 'Let Your Heart Be Warmed'?

"I actually don't know. Sometimes I get lost in old English. I have a real attraction to medieval music. The romantic part of me gets really attracted to it. It's the courtly thing, and the chivalry."

Is it the dressing up thing?

"No." She stops, definite. "I honestly think I was around then. In some way."

fuck treasure island

If death's holler is the violent musical heart of *This Fool Can Die Now*, its emotional centre is flux, throwing extreme shapes and spitting disturbed whispers from various extremities. Scout plays death one more time, substituting the cartoon psycho of 'Your Last Chariot' for a realistic gore on 'Yummy', a tale of extreme longing. No amplified crunch, no second voice to complete her, she's a naked mumble, intoxicated by love engorged to lust.

The words are hard to make out. Something about cheeks? Something about a heart?

"A heart is here". I'm talking about someone else's heart that's as ripe as mine."

You're not talking about the heart of the relationship?

"No, I was talking about someone else's heart. That's dark, and that was the one song where I was like, 'I don't know if I should do this one'. I talk about eating someone so they don't leave. Although that emotion felt very real, I was like..."

She pauses longer than usual.

"I kind of shocked myself that I could come up with that. I was a bit disturbed by it. Then I was like,



'Well, that means I have to keep it', like the fact that I'd disturbed myself was pretty interesting.

"I whispered that song kind of on purpose, because I felt like I was confessing something. It wasn't until I listened back to it that I realised I was hiding the lyrics. Because I was actually ashamed at what I was singing. But I still had the force to sing them, just about. It's kind of weird that nobody pointed that out to me at the time. In the studio they could have said, 'Can't you make yourself a bit clearer, Emma?'"

No easier to catch, even if more clearly enunciated, is the swinging scorched road trip of 'Nevada'. "Let's come home a little different," she purrs as a giddy twang rumbles thunder below. Is Nevada a love song to a place? Or the idea of a place changing you?

"It's about eloping to get married. In Nevada, obviously – you can just drive there, and get married and come home in the same day."

So in the first line you refer to a wedding dress as a 'costume'?

"Yeah." She laughs. "Well, I'm into costumes!"

Did you ever dress up in a wedding dress? Are you married?

"No, I haven't. I eloped. I didn't go through with it. I changed my mind. At the last minute. At the chapel."

Why?

"Obviously I realised that person wasn't the right person for me. And they weren't."

How did they react?

"They seemed a bit disappointed. But then they were probably relieved as well, cos I don't think they were ready to do it either. It was almost like a dare."

How do you get that far with someone when it's not right?

"I don't know. It's pretty scary. That's why I'm very relieved I came to my senses at the last minute."

So you came home changed but not quite in the way you expected?

"Yeah. It was basically over at the end of it."

do you want to be buried with my people?

The first two tracks on *This Fool Can Die Now*, 'Do You Want To Be Buried With My People' and 'Kiss', are both duets with Will Oldham, a guy I'd had down as a macho charlatan but lots of other fine folks seemed to respect. Eventually I came to like the high drama of his wandering harmonies, the way he skits over "Do you wannabe buried with my... people, dear?", sneaking out "people" like it's the rudest word he's ever heard, an unmentionable. Do you love me so much you're willing to trust the rest of your life to me? It's very romantic.

"The lyric 'Do you want to be buried with my people?' came from looking at someone's astrology chart. They have this certain position that's called 'Venus in Capricorn', which is where you're very slow to get into relationships but when you do, you're in it for the long haul, forever. In my pop astrology book it said their chat-up line is, 'Do you want to be buried with my people?' I was like, 'OK, I'll steal that'. It was based on me trying to analyse someone's makeup."

Because you identified with it?

"Yeah. But the thing was, I was feeling like I was in love with the person, and that to me was really attractive. I thought that that's something that might..." She trails off. "Yeah..."

I prompt her – that they were that sure...?

"That sure, and that steady, and that serious."

Will trips up over a line on that song.

"Yeah, he does. We wanted to do another take, but Steve [Albini] didn't think we needed to. I've put it as the first song on the album because it's one of my favourites. It's not like I look for those things, but when they happen... Nobody knows how this is supposed to go, so maybe this is how it's supposed to go. Who says it's supposed to be a certain way?"



'I eloped. I didn't go through with it. I changed my mind. At the last minute. At the chapel'

Will Oldham does more than just complement Scout's songs with his harmonies – on 'Kiss' he completes their romantic vision. Not just of a love hot enough to risk spontaneous combustion, "If it were not for the rain". Not just the music building verse-by-verse, from nervous breathy excitement through Scout almost whispering she, "Had a feeling it was coming on", to Will declaring, "My heart is charged now, oh it's dancing in my chest!", to the frenzied climax, both screaming in celebration, "It could have killed me". But of an ideal. Idealisation that happens despite realism; mindful of risks and consequences.

The idea that romance can kill is interesting.

"That whole fear factor, like, 'I know where I'm at, but shit, this is going to kill me if they don't feel the same way'."

You have to take it on trust.

"And that was the response of my line, 'If I'm a fool, then so it be': if I am going to make a fool of myself and this isn't reciprocal, then at least I'm recognising it's a gift to feel that much love for someone. At least this is something good, even though I might die from loving someone."

'Do You Want To Be Buried With My People' is an incredibly romantic song, I was picturing it being played at a wedding when I listened to it.

"Yeah, funnily enough I did play that at a wedding a couple of weeks ago. For a friend."

There's one or two lines in there of... not doubt, but fatalism. In the first verse, you say "Immortals no longer complain". Is that about death?

"That whole thing is actually taken from a traditional song. It's about looking forward to joining up with God."

How do you picture the afterlife?

"I'm kind of excited by it, because I feel like you just lose your body but you're still yourself. But you don't have all the constraints of earthly life."

If you got your body back, what age would it be?

"I'm not sure. I don't think you even think about it. Because you're not in the physical plane."

Are you visual, though?

"You can see, yeah. I think of it as like when you're dreaming."

Don't you ever think 'you're buried and that's it'?

"I contemplate it, because I like to think I don't know, because I don't know. But I'm pretty sure that we're not just gone."

just do it

Originally from Staffordshire, then resident in Nottingham, after making *Kidnapped By Neptune* Scout Niblett upped sticks and moved to the USA. She first went there in 1995 when she visited Oakland, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, Indiana and Portland. Now she's been back and lived in each place she visited on the original road trip, finally (for now) settling in Portland.

Did moving change your attitude to where you grew up?

"I'm sure it did, but it's hard to tell how. I mean, I see it as restrictive in some ways."

In what sense?

"Just the mentality of being brought up in the Seventies in England as quite a creative little soul, with a very liberal mum and quite a conservative dad, who were both teachers. I felt there was a lot of expectation on me."

To achieve?



"Not to achieve great success in general, but to be safe. To be secure. And those are the things that I absolutely abhor. My mum wanted me just to be happy, but my dad wanted me to be safe and secure. And I went for what made me happy, which was not at all safe or secure but was about just me, expressing myself.

"The environment in this country doesn't encourage kids to go for what they really want to do. In the back of my mind I had these tapes rolling, going, 'Yeah, but what are you going to do if that doesn't work out? What do you have as a safety net?' That is in the back of my head. Looking back on it now, from travelling a lot, that is a very British paranoia. That I hate."

A lack of a sense of adventure?

"And a lack of belief in ourselves outside of the history. Because what we're brought up on here is: this is what happens, this has been going on for hundreds of years, and you're the next generation of it. Not that I'm full-on into the American dream, but I kind of respect it because kids in America have been taught that they can do what they want. And OK, there's negative connotations of that, but the good side of it is they're a lot more liberated in what they think they can do with their life."

They're more willing to follow their dreams.

"Exactly. And I think that's fucking incredible. As a kid I didn't want to hear that I couldn't be an artist or a musician because, 'Nobody gets paid for doing that, only the best people in the world'. All of that paranoia. I don't know if it was just my family, but I've a feeling it's pretty common. I think what it does is make kids feel like they can't do it. Because if they could do it their parents would believe in them enough to say, 'Of course, just go ahead and do it'. Whereas I got, 'I'm worried, what if people don't like what you're doing?' Even now I get it."

miss in love with her own fate

If each of the characters on *This Fool Can Die Now* has their own set of foibles, they're joined by Scout's sense of right, an awareness of their place in the world: sure that they're doing all they can to make the reality of that world as cool as possibly can be.

Sometimes the voices get jumbled, like *Herman's Head* filled by a cast of dozens. There's a line in 'Baby Emma' that says, "*Don't be so sure just cos you get lonely, that you are not me, and I am not you*".

Are you talking to yourself there?

"Yeah. There's a part of me that doesn't feel separate to anybody else. That's me, that's the song. There's a part of me that does feel like you are the same as me, like part of you is me and I'm part of you. Like in the second-to-last song, 'Hide And Seek', where I say '*Hi, my name is God, I'm hiding in you*', that's the idea: that God's in everything, and we are God. There's no difference."

But you sing to someone you've split from, "*Wherever you are you still reside in me*". Even once you've made a break you can't quite let go.

"To me it was a double entendre. When there's a breakup the someone is still there, they don't go away. But also when someone dies they don't go away. They don't disappear just cos they're not physically here. It's all about relationships with different people, some that are still here but are not with you and some that have died and are with you still. Which is a weird paradox."

Have you lost someone recently?

"I lost my mum and my stepdad in January, two days apart. So that's the big thing on the album. I always sing about death anyway, but this time it was like, 'Oh, fucking hell. Oh, here we go. It's really happening.' We recorded the album in April, May. And I was an only child so it's like my family's been wiped out. I was kind of expecting it to happen but I didn't realise it was going to be so soon."

"I've always been obsessed with death. Since I was a little kid at primary school, every day, after



'In one song, I talk about eating someone so they don't leave. I kind of shocked myself that I could come up with that'

school, my mum would come home after me, and I used to be really paranoid that she was going to die in a car accident – to the point where I got panic attacks. Then you get through adolescence and adult life and you get over that, but then when it actually happens, it's like, 'Oh, shit...'"

Your roots are gone...

"Everything's gone."

Well, no...

"My memories are still there."

Not just your memories – you talk of people surviving in a literal spiritual sense.

"Yeah, I know she's still there. And that was kind of the weird thing about calling the album *This Fool Can Die Now*: I was like, 'God, I hope this isn't seen as disrespectful'. It wasn't – I knew the title was totally to do with the lyrics of that song '[Kiss]'. But it kind of felt weird that this year everything's been about death. It's kind of strange. It's weird to be so young and it's happened to me. I'm only 33."

And your stepfather died two days later?

"Yeah. At Christmas they were both really ill, and independently of each other he said, 'If she dies I'm not going to be here', and she said, 'If he dies I'm not going to be here', and that's exactly what they did. As soon as one was gone the other gave up. There was no point without each other. Which kind of feeds into my whole aesthetic and idea of love. It's that kind of deathly thing."

But that's what you got from them. It gives you hope.

"It does. It goes on, it doesn't die."

fishes and honey

And finally I got to the end of Scout's new album. Not 50 minutes after I started, but weeks. There's 'Comfort You', a Van Morrison song where lovers promise to carry the world for each other, a vision of love recognisably developed from the one of 'Kiss' but less about being at the mercy of grand forces, more about harnessing currents to nurture the now. Will and Scout sing to each other, "*You put the weight on me, and when it gets too much, much too much for me, I'll do the same thing that you do, And I'll put the weight on you*."

Then there's Scout's piano and vocal on 'Fishes And Honey', where she dreams: "*I have in mind to hold you each night, to make a nest for you. I have in mind to excite you right, to make you smile all day*."

It's a happy ending.

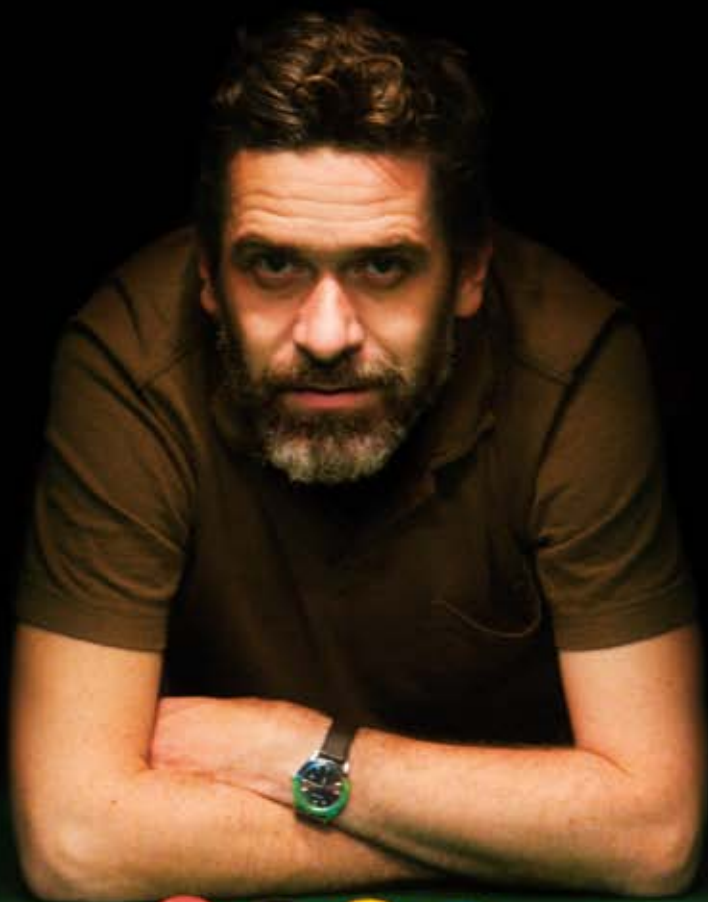
"Yeah, I wanted that intense grrrrrr" – she mimics the harsh whine which closes 'Hide And Seek' – "to go to that 'lulling someone to sleep' comforting sound."

So it's circular.

"It totally is. The beginning and the end are totally sweet and loving, and everything's exciting and nice, and positive." She smiles.

Some people fall on the pavement, scrape their knees and make an album about how they bleed. Scout goes through a maelstrom of crap and comes with a hymn to the beauty in the human condition. She's still smoking, still caught up in her twin vices of love and tobacco. Not that she hasn't learned anything, just accepted that sometimes the high prices are worth it. And if you're going to give one up, tobacco is probably easier.

Big Dada founder Will Ashon
keeps his eye on the ball



decade in the deep end

Words: **Neil Kulkarni**

Will Ashon photography: **Simon Fernandez**

From outer-limits UK rap to French electro and unsung US innovators, **Big Dada** has been blasting through hip hop's sound barrier for the good of the universe since 1997. We celebrate 10 years of searching for that mindfuck moment in the company of label founder **Will Ashon, Mike Ladd, Roots Manuva** and more

1997 was an odd moment of stasis and surge in hip hop, a crossroads year in which much of what's happened since was prefigured and set in motion. In the US, the encouraging growth in underground rap that brought us labels like Rawkus and Stones Throw was finding itself dead-ended and neutered by the cliquishness and elitism of the Bay Area and Nuyorican scenes. In the UK, British rap music was undergoing yet another crisis of confidence, ignored by the industry, isolated into tiny provincial pockets of resistance without a voice – stymied, silenced and dispersed, fatally burying its head in the sand. At a time when, worldwide, hip hop had assumed a significance that suffused pop culture, underground hip hop occupied a curiously curator-like position of endlessly retreating within the genre's borders, insisting protectively on an old skool reactionary vision of rap while the mainstream was on fire, blazing ahead.

Timbaland, Dre and Neptunes were all pushing sonic innovation to the fore by the late Nineties, but always within a strictly American, conventional context of name rappers and mostly conventional rapping. For a music that was having a worldwide impact, the monotony of Yank imperialism over the form was a drag. As a writer you realised how much was going on in the States that wasn't getting heard, that deserved a wider audience. And in the UK you realised how a whole generation of kids into rap simply weren't being encouraged by the industry to chase their visions – visions that occupied an entirely new space, open to music other than simply old skool hip hop, informed by the early Nineties explosion in electronica, rave, post-rock and jungle, and also the innovations of the late-Eighties to mid-Nineties cream of East Coast rap (Public Enemy, Native Tongues, Mobb Deep, Real Live, Blak Moon, Main Source, Beatnuts, etc). The only faith you could have, when the US seemed to be so on top, was that UK hip hop could quite easily just disappear off the map, get swallowed up by the scenes around it. Exhausted, beaten, you accepted this and looked for your own margin to die in. I flew my little white flag and waited.

And then a piece of plastic came through the door and changed everything. It was a ferocious slab of deranged hip hop noise from up north called 'Electronic Bombardment' by a crew called New Flesh For Old, and it was my first encounter with Big Dada, a label currently celebrating its 10th year dropping similar bombs on brainpads worldwide. Much of that magnificent mentalism can be found on *Well Deep: 10 Years Of Big Dada Recordings*, the double-disc comp/DVD that is this autumn's essential hip hop purchase. For label founder Will Ashon it's that crucial moment of mindfuck that's been the guiding impulse behind his label's continued survival.

"If I stopped getting moments like that I'd stop doing this," he admits. "Hip hop, more than any other music, has done that to me so many times. You hear something and *whoosh*, your head just gets smashed apart; you're left barely able to mouth the words, 'What the FUCK was that?' I can tell in about 10 seconds whether a demo is gonna do that. When it does, I try my hardest to release it."

Born in 1969, Ashon grew up in Leicester, attending Countesthorpe Community College.

"Countesthorpe was attacked for taking the comprehensive ideal 'too far'," he says. "We were basically taught by anarchists, communists, Maoists – one of my earliest memories was a field trip we had that consisted of chasing [Conservative cabinet minister

Gamma, South London, 2000



and Thatcher's sidekick] Keith Joseph around Leicester in a minibus and rocking his car while he was still in it! Happy days. It hinted to me that a proper job wasn't the be all and end all – when I left college I went through virtually every extra-10-quid-on-your-dole scheme they had in this effort to avoid work. It's a shame kids don't have that opportunity anymore."

watching Miles live in the mid-Eighties, that I'd missed out: that everyone I loved was either dying or dead or the living dead. The only music that held out the same possibilities as early-Seventies Miles or late Coltrane was hip hop. Public Enemy, the way they arranged sound and noise, the freedom and precision of what they did, it just blew me away."

'I've no interest in hip hop if it doesn't have that questing, forward-looking spirit. I think, as listeners, as fans, it's what we should expect' – Will Ashon

It was as a teenager in the early Eighties that Ashon's wastrel imagination was first fired by music. "The Thatcher years – pop was new and gleaming and aspirational. I gravitated towards the weirder side of jazz. I was a massive Miles Davis fan, into Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler. But I realised,

Ashon found himself writing about this love for a variety of music mags in the early- to mid-Nineties but found it curiously frustrating.

"Well, I never thought that a writer could 'make a difference' to the wider hip hop scene, but it was hugely annoying to be sent amazing records, write about them, and then get letters

New Flesh, on video shoot for 'Lie Low', 2002





Roots Manuva: 'You don't feel limited'

from people saying they simply couldn't buy the records, long stories about trips down to London to [now closed Latin and hip hop shop] Mr Bongo and they still can't find the 12-inch I've been banging on about. The seeds of starting my own label began there. I simply wanted a place where I could make sure the amazing things I was hearing could be heard

for us to start thinking about the label actually lasting longer than a year."

Setting up the label with Ninja Tune's help in 1997, among Ashon's first releases were two from left of leftfield – the vocal abstractions of Saul Williams incredible '1972 Elohim' and Mike Ladd's brainjangling 'Blah Blah', US talents criminally ignored in their native land

'Will Ashon has upped the bar in terms of what a label can do, and I think his artists have responded in kind' – Mike Ladd

by everyone. And when we started the label we were more concerned about press and promotion than other hip hop labels were.

"That paid off in the long run for sure, because when you start a label you only think about where the money for the next release is coming from, but we created sufficient buzz

but happy to find more open minds in Blighty.

"Will and I were room-mates in college!" says Mike Ladd, and I think he's bullshitting.

"I realised from the first time I worked with him musically that Big Dada was gonna be a different kind of label. With me they have been very patient. They let me crash at their house and leave me up to my own devices completely.

"Will never tried to interfere on the music side: when we were doing the Infesticons and Majesticons records he had ideas but he only ventured them if I needed help. He's confident enough to trust those artists he signs to bring him something fresh. He upped the bar in terms of what a label can do, and I think his artists have responded in kind."

Big Dada's laser eye-like ability to pull the best from the US underground hasn't let up in the past 10 years: as the only

imprint to pick up epochal releases from MF Doom's mighty King Geedorah, the brilliant and bewildering Busdriver, scene-shaker Diplo, Bay Area psych-rappers CLOUDDEAD (and more recently, being the first label smart enough to snap up Spank Rock's livid lethal ghetto-tech aggravation). Ashon feels justly proud of Big Dada's legacy in spotlighting US rap-talent the rest of the industry simply doesn't know how to deal with.

"At all times I've used the same criteria I did when I was a writer," insists Ashon. "Like, this has been on my deck for a minute now – do I feel different? Is it saying something new? Is it – here's a word that was important at school – revolutionary? All the American artists you've mentioned have ticked all those boxes – I've no interest in hip hop if it doesn't have that questing, forward-looking spirit. I think, as listeners, as fans, it's what we should expect."

Ask Mike Ladd who his favorite Big Dada artists are, though, and the answer is clear: "The British ones! Juice Aleem is a genius. Roots Manuva let me sleep at his flat once and I love his records! Anything with ponies on it is good so Infinite Livez is a favourite. Ty, New Flesh – all incredible, even if I do sound like a fucking cheerleader!" he laughs.

Indeed, awesome though the American Big Dada releases are, it's as a showcase for British talent that Big Dada becomes not just a cool importer of fresh tuneage, but a hugely important contributor to British cultural life for the past 10 years. Blame a guy called Rodney.

"If I get no rewind still I pay fools no mind"

– Roots Manuva, Sinking Sand

Before we get to him, though, New Flesh For Old were Big Dada's first UK signing. For Ashon it was crucial that the UK talent he signed had none of the self-pity and in-built defeatism that had characterised UK rap for so long.

"UK rap had been hidebound by so much scenesterism and bullshit. With New Flesh you immediately felt, these guys just don't give a fuck. They're making music that you can't even place – is it dub? Dancehall? Hip hop? Techno? Noise? Who knew and who cared – it just sounded fantastic – the fact that they didn't come from London [Toastie Taylor and Part 2 are from York; Juice Aleem, Birmingham], weren't limited by any scene and had just developed this incredibly fresh sound by themselves was amazing.

"I always look for a genuine personality behind the demos and tracks I hear – if I can't hear the fact that the person making the music is a complex, creative individual then I'm not interested. Crews and posess and connections are all well and good – I'm after uniqueness. With New Flesh I could hear Sonic Youth, Aphex, Sun Ra, avant-garde art... I could hear all these things within their sound but nothing could be isolated and explained. They simply didn't fit any kind of remit that British hip hop music had ever fallen into before. It was the same with Roots Manuva."

Rodney Smith, aka Roots Manuva, first recorded for Big Dada in 1999: the label has taken him from underground acclaim to overground success and one massive monster hit (the still-earthshaking 'Witness (One Hope)') and it's never even occurred to him to go anywhere else.

"With the last albums [2005's *Awfully Deep* and *Alternately Deep*] other labels were sniffing around, I think to try and get me to be 'hip hop for people who don't like hip hop' or some such nonsense," admits Rodney. "But

New recruit: Wiley



there was no other label out there that had a history of taking challenging music to wider audiences, so Big Dada had to be the place. Money comes and goes, but a creative straitjacket would be soul-destroying. It would have changed the sound. Experimentation is what's brought me to where I am now – what's great about Big Dada is that you don't feel limited, even by your own preconceptions about the label. I make pop music, or at least, I'm attempting to make pop music: the fact that people call it 'weird' and 'arty' doesn't bother me, it's my vision of pop music. And Big Dada have never tried to interfere with that. Big Dada have no interest in being the biggest or the baddest or the most extreme, they just want to be the best. They're a music label first and a hip hop label coincidentally."

And here we get to what's crucial, the reason Big Dada have lasted so long. Listening to their back catalogue, you get a picture of a nation, an alternative portrait of what living on this ruddy raw island means. Listen to, say, New Flesh's *Understanding*, Ty's *Closer*, Roots' *Run Come Save Me* and Infinite Livez' *Bush Meat* and you get not just a run of great albums but a devastating portrait of Nineties and Noughties British life unmatched by any other label, as complex and chaotic and compelling as the personae behind the beats and rhymes, and the changing environment around them.

If Big Dada were saddled to a reductionist notion of what hip hop music can be they'd simply be an occasional provider of essential 12-inches; by signing a welter of artists who

Infinite Livez, instigator of Art Brut Fe De Yoot



a singer, put out an album of songs – we've never done that! I'd like to basically keep myself interested by expanding and exploding the whole notion of what Big Dada can do. There's been plenty of times in the past decade where I've practically chewed my own hands off in frustration at how many records we sell compared to some of the appalling shit that

labels. And just the sheer quality of what they've given us – I mean, those TTC and Spank Rock albums just kill me – made it a no-brainer for me as to signing or not."

Onwards, upwards, inwards and outwards. No sign of stopping. If you haven't explored Big Dada's revolutionary roster yet I envy you the journey you'll embark on. For those who've

'Big Dada have no interest in being the biggest or the baddest or the most extreme, they just want to be the best. They're a music label first and a hip hop label coincidentally' – Roots Manuva

you feel couldn't exist anywhere else, they've provided a vital outpouring of voices (let's not forget Part 2, Gamma and newest UK recruit Wiley) that simply wouldn't be afforded the same space or faith elsewhere.

"No other British label would've given us the time of day," admits Para 1 of mindblowing French crew TTC. "We were so gloomy about sending anything to any label outside of France not just because of the language barrier but because our music can be so...confusing to some people. With Big Dada they got it instantly and it didn't matter that they couldn't understand what we were rapping about. In fact, Will told us he'd rather keep it that way!"

"When I was reminded that it was our 10-year anniversary I was like a sulky old fucker for weeks," grins Ashon, who now splits his time between Big Dada and his own burgeoning writing career (check the stunning *Clear Water* novel soon as you can). "I actually shouted at people, 'Fuck off, I don't wanna do anything to celebrate the fact that I'm so fucking old'. But listening back to the old stuff persuaded me it was worth celebrating. There are things that sound dated, things that sound incredibly fresh still, but I can safely say I've never put a record out that makes me cringe now. I'm proud of every single artist and album and single we've ever put out."

What next for Big Dada?

"What's been great about things so far is that what started as a hip hop label is starting to encompass so much more. I'd like to sign

seems to make it, but eventually you realise it's the body of work that matters, that lasts and endures. I see no reason Big Dada couldn't continue for another 10 years because there are still people who want to push boundaries with their music and Big Dada will be their natural home."

Crucially, this is a story that's still going on – just ask Big Dada's newest signing, Canadian rapper Cadence Weapon.

"As a fan, Big Dada just seems unmatched in keeping one step ahead and discovering cutting edge music," he affirms. "They're a totally open-ended entity now, but I think they do approach all their projects with a deep hip hop ethic instilled: freedom, freakiness, honesty. They seem to have their ear to the ground in a way that differentiates them from other indie

been listening, raise a glass to another 10 years at the top.

"We never underestimated the audience at Big Dada," states Ashon, "because we always assumed we were the audience. I hope we can keep it that way."

Parisian surrealist crew TTC





live

with every heartbeat

Words: David McNamee

Photography: Owen Richards

Robyn

Bush Hall, London

OK, so Robyn has re-signed to a major label, prompting the third issuing of an album that we first heard the best part of three years ago. And yes, I'm aware more than anyone that this kind of contradicts the pro-DIY/anti-major sentiments transmitting from the Robyn camp over the past 12 months that became her defiant calling card. It changes nothing.

She strides onstage to the bleeps'n'too-small beats of 'Cobrastyle' – a song she didn't write, that was popularised by another 'band' before her (and arguably done better), but which is now resolutely *her* song – with a giant prop laser gun clutched tight across her chest. Like, what else. Motherfucker.

She sings in a precise, robo-Scandinavian monotone, without breaking into a smile once and the earnestness is funny and endearing because we all can tell it's only half-pretend. The laser gun's there to remind us that it's OK to have fun. Then the beats kick in and she starts dancing – a kind of heroic thrashing that I love because it's *just* like how the music sounds, in her head.

shit to sidestep feeling guilty about being good. Robyn just doesn't do modest.

The presentation of this show, though, which she's been honing in London all year, is still unusual and unprecedented for someone who has more in common, historically, with Britney than MIA (note: not necessarily a bad thing). All of the songs sheared down to rattling bare bones, almost literally when it's just a percussive shudder underneath Robyn being 'Show Me Love' or Robyn being 'Be Mine!' Live, it's almost – accidentally – post-punk-pop, like if Neneh Cherry travelled back in time to Rip Rig and Panic armed with everything she'd learnt from 'Buffalo Stance'.

There are a lot of reasons why Robyn – as an entity – works. Firstly, the songs are fucking brilliant and the album's a classic – a rare thing in pop music, which is largely incompatible with the long-player format. Secondly, she's fucking brilliant. There is nothing not to love about Robyn. But she doesn't make the music or write all the words; she kind of curates the elements that comprise her sound, breathes life into it, and that's a skill as much as any other, but there's something *else*.

She's the singing collective unconscious of our pop dreaming

Whatever industry schematic Robyn originally set out to change is still being mapped, tentatively, and the only viable option for shipping mass-produced product to pop audience outsider of the dreaded major system is in the indie label. Indie accrues credibility, sure, but credibility, like pride, is for people who have nothing else left; and me, and everyone else who heard the original version of *Robyn* in 2005, wanted these songs – somewhat improbably, it seemed at the time – to be everywhere, in the pop charts, at Number One.

Robyn struts and bounces and dances like a fucking beautiful gawky Swede and the feeling I feel more than any other is just pride. It really feels like one of our team got through, that the good guys won for a change. 'Konichiwa Bitches' is still kinetic, cute – an arse-kicking pop record of the kind you wish Crystal Castles could make. She breaks with tradition and pounds out 'Who's That Girl' – *The Knife's* 'Who's That Girl' – replacing Olof's megalithic shifting, interlocking grid of colour and beats with just keyboard and two drummers; and it still owns.

This is NOT indie music. Even at its most stripped down it is histrionic, futuristic, unpretentious and unashamed of being overly dramatic; it doesn't have to pretend to be a bit

Kieron Gillen recently queried, astonished, whether Los Campesinos! are a band that "we" made up when we were drunk; they just seem to be exactly like the kind of thing we'd invent. Robyn feels like that to me. Like she's the singing collective unconscious of our pop dreaming; not part of any one lineage but made up out of scraps of odd pop we remember and cherish, and distorted and amplified in the remembering. We feel so attached to her because we feel like we've invested a lot of ourselves into this stuff.

Y'know, it's like the bit at the end of the last series of *Doctor Who*, where the Doctor gets Jesus'd up through the charged collective hope of the proles hooked into the Archangel Network and starts glowing so he's indestructible when he faces the Master, except, y'know, with nu-rave as the Master, and not shit.

Robyn, please release 'Who's That Girl' and 'Be Mine!' immediately (finally!) as singles, destroy the British pop charts and go home and make a new album with Jenny Wilson. It's been nearly three years since *Robyn*. This and Ninja High School is all the power my headphones need, but I can't live in 2005 for the rest of my life.



A guy with a gigantic furry lobster clamped to his back leads a small conga, trailing whiffs of seafood in his wake



we accept you

Words: **Lauren Strain, Everett True**
Filthy Pedro photography: **Frances Barry**

Summer Antifolk Festival 12 Bar Club, London

Friday

It's my first antifolk night. So far, a guy with a gigantic furry lobster clamped to his back has led a small conga, trailing whiffs of seafood in his wake. There've been some magnificent ginger jokes – if there are such things – leveled at compère Robert Tyrone Jones's colossal barnet, and I've clocked the bull's horns protruding from the wall. **Martin Hungry Dog** sings, alone, about the village idiot. You find yourself choked; then, 'A Long Way From Here' says everything anyone needs to know about war, all rag-n'-bone-man enunciation and acrid truth. He bows with a well-placed Johnny Cash cover – mongrel-fleeced, itchy-eared, sweet – and we watch **Alien Jazz Party** scream about fried chicken with the fury of all hell.

Chris 'The Lips' of **JJ Crash** sports 20 harmonicas hanging like artillery around his hips; smashing one into his teeth, he unleashes metal squalor from its grill. "I'm an apeman! I wanna

make a little money and stick my spade in the sand!" cracks Crash himself – an analogy for the financial obesity and backwards thinking of the aspiratory middle-class if ever I heard one. You can see 'em – lumpy troglodytes thickly grinning at newly-painted picket fences, knuckles bumping along the lawn. The 12 Bar cheers – they'll never be, nor want to be, like these people. Instead, they mosh, they shake, they jack-knife to the sides. They burst party-poppers and gunk-spray strangers 'til the can's empty. They clap as Rhi from **David Cronenberg's Wife**'s cloggy keyboards undercut Tom's vocals (themselves like wasps with sinus issues.) They clap as **Filthy Pedro** do their filthy, jovial, rowdy thing. At midnight, if I weren't so physically wrecked and tripping through Soho subways, I'd be back inside with these happy dilettantes. Mum, can I go play with these kids? I'm bored of our neighbourhood. (LS)

Saturday

It's my first London antifolk night. Alright. Second, then. "They're not like us up in London, Everett," Larry Pickleman warns. "They like to play songs." He says the final word with a feral shudder...

Outside, Scrappy from Milk Kan is chattering excitably nonsense with **Lucy Joplin**. They've been

awake for 48, wait...72 hours...wait, why's Lucy onstage, berating all and sundry for letting her clamber up, playing her 'size zero' acoustic folk, stopping one song cos she'd forgotten she'd started it? **Adrian Teenbeat** follows; the man is wrapped in a sweater, droll and unshaven. His songs are trembling, spidery beasts, only slightly undermined by his propensity for entendres. Next up are **Misterlee**, the swine! They've dismantled Sarah from Wet Dog's drum kit, the swine, and spread it way across the stage: an amp resting on a snare here, a cymbal stuffing up a fireplace there. Their music (a racketsy, Fall-esque compendium of grunts and unfunny in-jokes) is too horrible for even me to contemplate...which is a compliment, now I think on it.

The Legend! provokes a bout of pogoing when I forgo my 'performance poetry' to sing out deranged half-witticisms over a freely perspiring... I mean, improvising... **Wet Dog**. Fuck 'em. Wet Dog continue; hugs, tickling and hair-ruffling the order of the day. The band is sharp, abrasive, catchy, deadpan, smart, mostly sober...amazingly focused. Melodies scour like tall grass near a dilapidated windmill: harmonies burr and hum like mirrors creaking in the night: new bassist Billy Easter plunges, anyhow. What a great feeling. (ET)

Brakes

Water Rats, London

It's been a long summer road for Brighton's Brakes, several months spent trekking round the European festivals and along American highways. If they're tired, though, they're not showing it, tumbling onto the stage with a relaxed exhalation, like the end is in sight. Frontman Eamon Hamilton twitches and squeaks, spraying saliva from the centre of a broiling 'Cheney' as the band shift around him, all plunging axes and tilted heads, threatening to lose themselves in distortion and disorientation but always pulling back from the brink. But it's the other side of Brakes that strikes me most, though, their

softer side. It's there in 'Beatific Visions', which glides towards completion in a sweet haze of guitar hooks and stop-start harmonies, and it's there in 'New York Pie' and 'Fell In Love With A Girl', tender moments that strike chords with the drunken romantics of the audience. Brakes, you see, are aware that emotions are potent chemicals – and it's the way they mix them tonight that makes them truly special.

Jonathan Falcone

Daedelus Buffalo, Cardiff

So there are some excellent warm-up sets from one-man Welsh electronica guru

Stabmaster Vinyl and from the space-age soundscape engineer **Mr Ronz**, but we're here for Ninja Tune's Alfred Darlington, aka Daedelus.

Dressed as Jack the Ripper in camo skate daps, Daedelus stands behind a small table with laptop attached umbilically to a 'magical music box' – a wooden instrument with about 150 small round buttons that seem to flash randomly, setting off vocal samples, beats, discordant stabs and severed electronic rhythms with every flick and press. The result is an orchestrated, barely chartable genre free-for-all – techno, trip hop, drum'n'bass, jazz and house moulded and melded, fed out as a bass-heavy broken disco

mess. The crowd move from nervous beard-twiddling to comprehensive jacking mayhem, but by now, Daedelus' mind is away with the machines, fingers never dancing from his twinkling box..

Helia Phoenix

Halleluwah

Holocene, Portland

In its second year, Halleluwah – the brainchild of Mike McGonigal, editor of outsider publications *Chemical Imbalance* and *Yeti* – is both local celebration of an often inspired Portland, Oregon scene and another fine entry in the many low-key avant-garde festivals that have sprouted up



barbed wire kisses

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**
Photography: **Simon Fernandez**

The Jesus And Mary Chain Brixton Academy, London

We are generally ambivalent about going to see bands we used to like reunited. We are far more interested in the cheap thrills of new bands, awkward, unpredictable, most often terrible, but occasionally mind-blowing. For The Jesus And Mary Chain, though, we are willing to make an exception, quelling skepticism with nostalgia and even entertaining a friend's suggestion that rock's ageism is unfounded: why is it that in classical music no one questions the idea of performing an established repertoire centuries after the novelty of its composition?

We observe The Horrors' impressive coiffures and think about the irony of them supporting a band that will later tonight sing *"I don't care about the state of my hair"* sporting far less of it than they used to, we sit through Evan Dando's set getting antsy and wishing we'd brought along our Nintendo DS.

But when Jesus And Mary Chain finally take the stage, it doesn't matter how big and formal Brixton

Academy seems compared to the intimate chaos we know they used to generate, and it becomes clear that this is no re-enactment of some mythical Eighties riot, just a run through some amazing songs to which decades of bands are indebted. They are as charismatic as ever. There is no banter, no nonsense, just every single one of the hits backed by a blinding, suitably euphoric light show.

Their music has always been a concise distillation of the bare essentials of rock'n'roll, and they clearly see no need to diverge from a winning

This is the music we fell in love to

formula, even if the bare essentials turn out to be the stuff all around the music, the textures elicited from the feedback which make trying to listen to this with earplugs totally pointless. Unlike, say, Suicide, who have also pared American Fifties music down to its gnawed old bones, The Jesus And Mary Chain do not indulge in any jazzy improvisation on the theme. Instead we get straight-talkin' candy-walkin', honey-drippin', fuzzed-up guitar noise belying black as black but cola-sweet melodies.

In the two decades since the Mary Chain launched their sonic attack, many bands have adopted their signature bone crushing feedback sound as a kind of critique of the machismo of rock, treating it as the negative space wrapped around the hard core of the pop song. But the Mary Chain (like Guitar Wolf and Coachwhips) understand that loud noise is not an escape from, but the quintessential truth of popular music: only in merging pop ecstasy with physical pain can this modern religion fulfil its Catholic mission.

All this religious metaphor might seem a bit over the top, but hey, they did say they wanted to die just like Jesus Christ (with the radio on). JAMC don't just appropriate the language of the Church in obvious blasphemy, they turn it against itself to reveal and revel at the same time in its sensuous appeal, and under the venue's dramatic fake sky, bathed in the faux fairy light starlight, we are brought back into their fold. Few bands manage to make songs about death and disease so uplifting and, conversely, words like honey and candy sound positively filthy. We mouth the words to every song, like everyone around us – a strange mix of ages and degrees of gothness – and we can't stop smiling on the way home. This is the music we fell in love to, and it still sends shivers down our spine.

in America in recent years. The three-day affair has grown more elaborate after its debut, featuring a well-received literary spot on the second day highlighted by an entertaining reading from Jana Martin as well as a variety of DJs performing throughout the weekend, including McGonigal himself.

Bands remain the core, though, and while a few performances are perfunctory or simply out of place, the successes more than make up for it. **Tara Jane O'Neil's** haunting, powerful set is made all the more so with the participation of local dance/performance art legend Fred Nemo, while the **Evolutionary Jass Band's** inspiring celebrations and

Cexfux's barely controlled energy both prompts mass dancing and cheers galore. **Damo Suzuki's** concluding performance with an ad hoc group of local musicians is good fun, but the Can man's true highlight is a stellar set with the powerful **Master Musicians Of Bukkake**, a psych-Kraut masterpiece that rivals Boredoms at their most triumphant.

Here's to next year.

Ned Raggett

Health Barden's Boudoir, London

You can't just start a riot down the pub anytime you want to. If the ground isn't

fertile, you can punch the bartender, jump up on the bar and declare yourself the reincarnation of Krishna and nothing will happen. If anyone pays any attention at all, they'll probably just assume it's performance art. But if enough people will violence at the same time, even the slightest friction is sufficient to make decent law abiding citizens into bloodthirsty suburban savages.

Similarly, prolonged technical difficulties can ruin a good band and bore an audience to death, but they can also help build healthy levels of tension, to which the atmosphere at Barden's Boudoir attests as Health struggle with defective electronics and

insubordinate guitars. The band's frantic efforts to get their gear going culminates in one of the best soundchecks we have ever witnessed – more like a tiny song really, a nonchalant 'check, check, check' chant and a few fierce chords.

For the rest of the night, these energies are well channelled into a ritualistic display of Health's art-noise. The percussion is heavy and edgy, the songs are like a wrestling arena for a fight between the band, crouching on stage over their mono-drums and guitars, and the remainder of their stubborn equipment.

The end result – a tie.
Pil and Galia Kollektiv

summer's edge

Words: Frances Morgan

Richard Youngs photography: Xavier Watkins

Palimpsest Festival

All Saints' Church, Cambridge

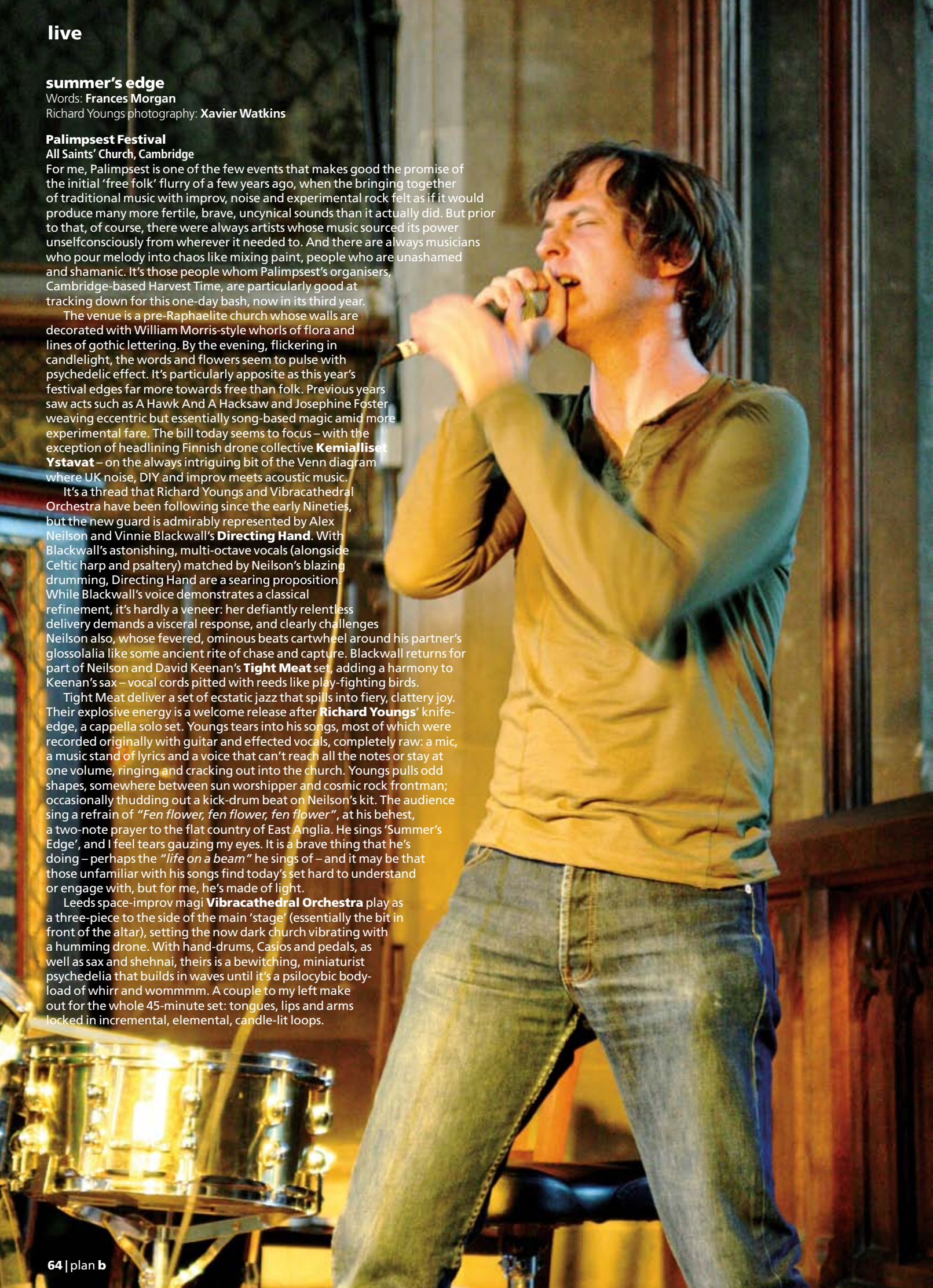
For me, Palimpsest is one of the few events that makes good the promise of the initial 'free folk' flurry of a few years ago, when the bringing together of traditional music with improv, noise and experimental rock felt as if it would produce many more fertile, brave, uncynical sounds than it actually did. But prior to that, of course, there were always artists whose music sourced its power unselfconsciously from wherever it needed to. And there are always musicians who pour melody into chaos like mixing paint, people who are unashamed and shamanic. It's those people whom Palimpsest's organisers, Cambridge-based Harvest Time, are particularly good at tracking down for this one-day bash, now in its third year.

The venue is a pre-Raphaelite church whose walls are decorated with William Morris-style whorls of flora and lines of gothic lettering. By the evening, flickering in candlelight, the words and flowers seem to pulse with psychedelic effect. It's particularly apposite as this year's festival edges far more towards free than folk. Previous years saw acts such as A Hawk And A Hacksaw and Josephine Foster weaving eccentric but essentially song-based magic amid more experimental fare. The bill today seems to focus – with the exception of headlining Finnish drone collective **Kemialliset Ystävät** – on the always intriguing bit of the Venn diagram where UK noise, DIY and improv meets acoustic music.

It's a thread that Richard Youngs and Vibracathedral Orchestra have been following since the early Nineties, but the new guard is admirably represented by Alex Neilson and Vinnie Blackwall's **Directing Hand**. With Blackwall's astonishing, multi-octave vocals (alongside Celtic harp and psalter) matched by Neilson's blazing drumming, **Directing Hand** are a searing proposition. While Blackwall's voice demonstrates a classical refinement, it's hardly a veneer: her defiantly relentless delivery demands a visceral response, and clearly challenges Neilson also, whose fevered, ominous beats cartwheel around his partner's glossolalia like some ancient rite of chase and capture. Blackwall returns for part of Neilson and David Keenan's **Tight Meat** set, adding a harmony to Keenan's sax – vocal cords pitted with reeds like play-fighting birds.

Tight Meat deliver a set of ecstatic jazz that spills into fiery, clattery joy. Their explosive energy is a welcome release after **Richard Youngs'** knife-edge, a cappella solo set. Youngs tears into his songs, most of which were recorded originally with guitar and effected vocals, completely raw: a mic, a music stand of lyrics and a voice that can't reach all the notes or stay at one volume, ringing and cracking out into the church. Youngs pulls odd shapes, somewhere between sun worshipper and cosmic rock frontman; occasionally thudding out a kick-drum beat on Neilson's kit. The audience sing a refrain of "*Fen flower, fen flower, fen flower*", at his behest, a two-note prayer to the flat country of East Anglia. He sings 'Summer's Edge', and I feel tears gauzing my eyes. It is a brave thing that he's doing – perhaps the "*life on a beam*" he sings of – and it may be that those unfamiliar with his songs find today's set hard to understand or engage with, but for me, he's made of light.

Leeds space-improv magi **Vibracathedral Orchestra** play as a three-piece to the side of the main 'stage' (essentially the bit in front of the altar), setting the now dark church vibrating with a humming drone. With hand-drums, Casios and pedals, as well as sax and shehnai, theirs is a bewitching, miniaturist psychedelia that builds in waves until it's a psilocybic body-load of whirr and wommmm. A couple to my left make out for the whole 45-minute set: tongues, lips and arms locked in incremental, elemental, candle-lit loops.





He spins stories from every cut and bruise and bad memory

road worthy

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Photography: **Pat Graham**

Modest Mouse

The Forum, London

Evidently, something happened while my attentions were elsewhere. Time was when Modest Mouse were that most curious of curate's eggs, a group awash with press kudos, about whom the words 'Next Big Thing' were often bandied in that late 20th Century era when the success of *Nevermind* seemed the exception that proved a rule, that underground bands of such an obscure ilk would never trouble the mainstream.

Certainly, for all their evident worth, there was little about Modest Mouse which tipped them for crossover success, their songs elliptical and gravely grooves backing frontman Isaac Brock's barked and mush-mouthed *Gummo*-esque tales of depression, aimlessness, and alienation, exacting a bitter (but often beautiful) poetry from endless interstates and the trash that gathers idly between them. And even as they shed the corrugated rambles of *The Lonesome Crowded West* in favour of the bruised luminosity of *The Moon And Antarctica*, theirs was a glow warmly and quietly

gazing through clouds, perceptible only to the most earnest night-sky-watchers.

Tonight their numbers, now greatly swollen, still seem cluttered on so wide a stage, so guitarists pop up behind one of the two drumkits, ever-manned by two full-time percussionists. Stage left, throwing exultant rock star shapes but still dwarfed by the skewed Americana arkestra about him, Johnny Marr wields a guitar sounding like ominous thunder, with a focus that suggests any rock star egos have been left in the dressing room, subsumed in the name of the growling, quaking sound rumbling from the speakers. Evidently, some things have changed.

Not Isaac Brock, though. It makes perfect sense that the vulnerable brute, upon ascending to some weird Rock Star status, would take his place stage-right, away from the spotlight, in the gutter or armpit of the room, still barking, still singing through loudhailers, still spinning gossamer from splinters and broken glass. In plain tee and jeans, he looks like a young Springsteen, all poetic honesty, spinning stories from every cut and bruise and bad memory, with the sort of confidence you pick up from the road, like a motorway tan.

The music is martial, driven by that incessant double drumkit rattle, rasping from heavily-

strummed acoustic guitars and chiming electrics singing syncopated melodies that sound like King Sunny Ade, were he raised in the Pacific Northwest. Brock's vocals alternate between scabbed holler and vulnerable caress, always tender. Still, at the foreground, those country-motorik rhythms, an academic funk that still moves, an American Afrobeat, strangely echoing *Stop Making Sense*-era Talking Heads.

The floor is shuddering, because the capacity audience are jumping up and down, in as exact a unison as the lager will allow, to the song. The Song is, of course, 'Float On', the 'something that happened', the 'song from the advert' – the 21st Century of MTV putting your clip into heavy rotation – and the reason Modest Mouse can sell out places like The Forum. It's a song much as any Modest Mouse song, something fragile bolstered by muscular percussion and pushed out there through the sheer untamed spirit of Isaac Brock, shaking his body to the stomp, raging and flailing, lost in it. Something's changed, but it isn't Isaac or his Modest Mouse, what they do, or the way they do it. Some more ears just opened is all, and if it took a TV commercial to do that, only a dead-hearted cynic would begrudge Brock that, after so long in the wilderness.

The Hold Steady

Electric Ballroom, London

Forget that they're *old*. Forget that unnerving London phenomenon of the audience being packed at the back and weirdly sparse down the front. Forget that there's a lot of dark, questionable appropriated nostalgia at work here, and that we're all glorifying the great American myth far more than we should be. Whatever.

We love this band, these songs, these words, a million times more than all the cerebral stuff that is unquestionably next to it on our iPods.

The botched falsetto during 'Chillout Tent', the triumphant second chorus of 'Your

Little Hoodrat Friend', frontman Craig Finn's defiant, overweight cartoon character meta-narrative that he's shouting off mic throughout.

Sure, the 'Beer: YEAH!' shtick gets intermittently jarring – but when you sip whatever you're drinking everything makes sense. They should have handed out bottles of Bud as you got your hand stamped. Attempting to explain The Hold Steady makes them sound crass.

It's the fact that the whole band sell every nuance of their performance with complete sincerity which elevates them from retro chancers to total fucking heroes.

Thom Gibbs

Jazkamer/John Wiese

Henry's Cellar Bar, Edinburgh

You meet interesting characters at a Giant Tank free noise evening.

None more so than the fantastically drunk Stephen King lookalike, buttoned up in an arms-concealing leather coat, who barrels up to the terrified kids saying, 'Boy, that sure is some music ain't it?', and when he hears that music he has to let it all out.

And so he proceeds to wheeze along on a harmonica to Usurper and Hockyfrilla's chundering grumbings, occasionally breaking away from his instrument to howl at the moon, before Kylie Minoise

scares him away to tangle with the neds on Lothian Road.

It's a darn shame he misses the power trio of Jazkamer and John Wiese, they sure are some music also. A guitar and double laptop multigrind sound constructing a fairly impressive approximation of what one might hear in a swiftly collapsing multi-storey building.

It's a blinding white, girder-tearing sheet of molten metal, Jazkamer's Lasse Marhaug a bald leviathan at the eye of the storm. Christ knows what the diners in the Chinese restaurant upstairs must think.

Boy, some music.

Euan Andrews



on tour: dillinger escape plan

Interview: Louis Pattison

What's the absolute worst debauchery you've seen the road reduce people to?

"This is an easy question, and the answer actually took place in Europe! We had a guy on tour with us named Jeff Wood, an ex-live bassist of ours who also stars in a little band called Shat you may have heard of. Anyhow, we played a show, and then afterwards, outside of a church where the legend of Humpty Dumpty was born, Jeff laid down in the street and let a girl 'power-ralph' on his face. Then he ate a noodle out of the vomit. And then another girl came and pissed on his face to wash the vomit off!

"I mean, over a long enough timeline on tour, you eventually see and, uh, *do* enough shit that you pretty much become numb to anything shocking anyone could ever show you. The flip side of

'You can easily morally bankrupt yourself to the point where you can never come back'

it – the dark side – is that you can easily morally bankrupt yourself to the point of where you think you could never come back and enjoy normal things again, and you have to be careful not to lose yourself. But that being said, it's better to go off the deep end and see how far you can go and still come back than to never go at all. I guess."

The worst injuries and/or illnesses (self-inflicted or not)?

"Having teeth knocked out of my mouth by Ben's guitar."

The most life-affirming act of kindness you've seen in the face of rolling carnage?

"Probably the girl who stepped forth to cleanse the vomit from Jeff Wood's face with her piss. Haha!"

(Greg Puciato, singer)

New Jersey's brutal, super-technical mathcore *Übermenschen* soften up the UK in anticipation of their forthcoming November release on Relapse, *Ire Works*.

Yeovil Orange Box (November 3), Manchester Academy 3 (4), Birmingham Academy 2 (5), Sheffield Corporation (6), Glasgow Cathouse (7), Newcastle Academy (8), Bristol Academy (9), London Mean Fiddler (10)

live previews

women in devolt

Stripped down, acoustic performances from women not typically to be found stripped down or, indeed, acoustic: Gina Birch, formerly of The Raincoats, Laetitia Sadier of Stereolab, Lil' Lost Lou, "chanteuse of the future" Anne Pigalle, and Krista LL Muir of Lederhosen Lucil (*Plan B* promises we have not made any of these up).

London Bush Hall (October 8)

acoustic ladyland

The acceptable face of jazz fusion do their skronky, punky, big-hair thing around the UK, which ought to be the ideal place to net their new album *ALive* via some sort of friendly face-to-face transaction.

Poole Mr Kyps (October 10), Guilford The Boileroom (12), Norwich Oxjam (23), London Luminaire (November 22)

los campesinos

Welsh Academia's Twee Mafia are going to fuck you right up, sunshine.

Wrexham Central Station (October 11), Liverpool Barfly (12), Manchester Night&Day (13), Glasgow King Tuts (15), Edinburgh Cabaret Voltaire (16), Newcastle University (17), Leeds Cockpit (19), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (20), Birmingham Custard Factory (21), Brighton Komedia (22), London ULU (23), Colchester Arts Centre (25), Norwich Arts Centre (26), Sheffield Fuzztival (27), Cambridge Portland (29), Southampton Joiners (30), Exeter Cavern Club (31)

jakobinarina

On reflection, they're still our favourite band from Hafnarfjörður – which, as you're aware, is Iceland's second biggest port – and now exports the Wu-Tang/Suicide/ELO-loving rompedelic sextet right in yer face.

Oxford Academy (October 13), Southampton, Guildhall (14), Exeter Lemon Grove (16), London Forum (17)

jeffrey lewis

Comic book guy Jeffrey Lewis scrawls and drawls his way across the UK to promote his new *Plan B* Album Of The Month *12 Crass Songs*. Do you owe him a living? Nope, but it'll be super fun regardless.

London Brixton Windmill London (October 14, afternoon show), Cambridge Portland Arms (14), Cardiff Clwb Ifor Bach (15), London 93 Feet East (15), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (17), Ashford Downtown Diner (18), Flamouth Miss Peapod (19), Edinburgh Cabaret Voltaire (21), Durham Walkabout (22), Hull The Adelphi (23), Brighton The Audio (24), Norwich Queen Charlotte (25)

gravenhurst

This nighttime safari should see Warp's purveyors of understated epics infiltrate your neighbourhood much as they themselves seem cankered by creeping paranoia.

Southampton Joiners (October 15), Brighton Freebutt (16),

Cambridge Portland Arms (17), Norwich Arts Centre (20), Leeds Faversham (21), Sheffield Corporation (22), Newcastle Cluny (23), Hull Adelphi (24), Aberdeen Snafu (25), Glasgow King Tut's (26), Coventry Taylor John's House (27), Cardiff Point (29), London Luminaire (30)

kling klang

Liverpool's prime kosmonauts head off down the motorway and in search of space with a veritable battalion of motorik grooves and a few too many synths, ahead of a European tour and ATP's Nightmare Before Christmas. Support for the 25 October hometown show comes from local heads Mugstar and London cosmic doom duo Morgen Und Nite.

Manchester Café Saki (October 19), Nottingham Rose of England (20), Birmingham Hare & Hounds (21), Cambridge Portland Arms (22), London Corsica Studios (23), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (24), Liverpool Barfly (25), Edinburgh Hive (26), Glasgow Barfly (27)

no-fi 100

Newcastle's top avant promoters toast their 100th gig with a free-jazz/free-folk freak-out, starring Evan Parker, Alex Neilson, Michael Flower, Vanishing Voice, Hrvatski, One Ensemble, Jez Riley French, Cath And Phil Tyler, Jazzfinger and more.

Newcastle The Cluny (October 20)

help she can't swim

What do you do after *The Death Of Nightlife*? You hit the road, you hit it hard, YOU KEEP HITTING IT and you emerge the other side reformed characters, cured of all yr adolescent needs. Yay! (Bored now.)

Lazarette Festival Bristol Thekla (October 21) Bristol, London Koko (26)

the chap

Sarcastically angular London art rockers aim to raise eyebrows across the land with a tour showcasing songs from their next counterblast, due 2008.

Cambridge Man On The Moon (October 25), UK Bristol Cube (November 2), Glasgow Admiral Bar (4), Aberdeen Electric Boutique (5), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (7), Manchester Cafe Saki (8), Coventry Taylor John's House (9), London Corsica Studios (11)

animal collective

Get really wild with the *Plan B* cover stars, who smear their *Strawberry Jam* over the face of the UK (and Dublin).

Bracknell Wilde Theatre (October 28), Brighton St George's Church (29), Bristol Trinity (30), London Astoria (November 1), Manchester New Century Hall (3), Dublin Tripod (4), Leeds Irish Centre (5), Glasgow Ora Mor (6)

bat for lashes

Mercury-nominated pop princess Natasha Khan flits back to the UK with a new, expanded band for an exclusive one-off show for those Eat Your Own Ears sorts.

London KOKO (October 29)

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album

reality whitewash

Words: **Louis Pattison**
Illustration: **Jeffrey Lewis**

Jeffrey Lewis

12 Crass Songs (Rough Trade)

On his 'The History Of Punk On The Lower East Side', New York antifolk singer Jeffrey Lewis played it like a cross between an oral historian and human jukebox, relating a spoken word piece charting the path to punk rock from the Holy Modal Rounders to Richard Hell's 'Blank Generation' interspersed with bursts of song in his laconic, Droopy Dog drawl. On *12 Crass Songs*, Lewis turns his attention across the Atlantic. *12 Crass Songs* is, as the title suggests, a covers album of songs by Crass, the black-clad isolationist rock cell who, from their commune-like base Dial House on the outskirts of Epping Forest, spat out a string of impossibly angry records decorated in stark stencil and Gee Vaucher's Situationist-influenced collage that ranged from 1978's *Feeding Of The Five Thousand* – which set the tone for the next decade of anarcho-punk – to 1981's proto-riot grrrl *Penis Envy*. The right hated them, these dangerous anarchists out to smash the state. The left hated them too, the band's stubborn refusal to march under the Socialist Worker banner. Crass imploded under their own friction in 1984, and their influence since has been chequered – The Poison Girls and Southern Studios, yes, but also no



shortage of joyless DIY punks who used Crass' cry of 'no rules' as a wasteland on which to build new cliques, rules, and power structures.

Against this backdrop, Jeffrey Lewis' reinventions feel like a breath of fresh air. If music is, as I suspect, not so much about articulating the things we can express through words as evoking the things we can't, *12 Crass Songs* succeeds utterly. Recreating the originals with acoustic guitar, piano, and girl choirs, this blend of stool-perched anti-folk and anarchist polemic is eerily beautiful and strangely affecting, juxtaposing bile and prettiness, euphoria and rage; the chance meeting of a coffee shop barista and a revolutionary barricade. So, 'Do They Owe Us A Living' gallops along on trapped drums, its drop-out snarl recreated as boot-slapping outlaw hoe-down. 'End Result', Penny Rimbaud's withering satire of consumerism, gains a new face in Lewis' self-deprecating lilt: "I am the dirt that everyone walks on/I am the orphan that nobody wants". And there's 'Punk Is Dead', Crass turning barrels on the movement that inspired them to action (and only five songs into their debut album, too). Truthfully, it's an attack on rock idolatry, a topic natural in Jeffrey's hands: "I'm tired of staring through shit-stained glass/I'm tired of staring up

a superstar's ass," he sings atop delicate finger-picked guitar, as piano picks out a wonky elegy.

If there's a tangible umbilical cord that joins Jeffrey's world to Crass, it's perhaps the presence of guilt. Jeffery's is introspective and self-lacerating; Crass' is spiritual and inured, the psychic fracture of those straitened in Catholicism, all too aware of the blood on their hands (and the ironic thing about Crass is that for all their anti-Christian songs, their spirit remains deeply religious, motivated by the prospect of salvation). Such salvation is glimpsed most clearly on the album's one actually rockin' electric track, 'Big A Little A', the sound of spiritual freedom sighted against a grim horizon of mutually assured destruction. The chorus goes: "Be exactly who you want to be/Do what you want to do/I am he and she is she/You're the only you/No one else has got your eyes, can see the things you see/It's up to you to change your life and my life's up to me..." Then toms build in righteous thunder, a shrieking guitar swinging in like a policeman's truncheon.

Maybe this is heresy to some, but to these ears some of what's here improves on Crass' originals. No disrespect to them: it just means three decades on, when The Sex Pistols' songs sound like cabaret classics and The Clash ring rock-star hollow, the

The chance meeting of a coffee shop barista and a revolutionary barricade

actual matter of their songs remains potent like forgotten gunpowder; still laced with possibilities.

The song I love most here is 'Where Next Columbus'. It's a systematic destruction of Western thought, the legacies of Marx, Mussolini, Jung and Einstein revealed as intellectual tyrannies. Ideas that lead to movements, movements that lead to systems, systems that lead to murderous purges and clicking jackboots, Seroxat zombies and the atom bomb. Jeffrey handles it sweetly, his sad resignation undercut by the glide of Crystal Madrilejos' cello. I figure that if Crass had a message, ultimately, it was that of Alastair Crowley: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law". In the wrong hands, that motto can be foreboding; but in Jeffrey's voice, weak like a hummingbird's heartbeat, but propped up with hope, it still sounds like a reason for living.



speed sublime

Words: Frances Morgan

Illustration: Nick White

Harmonia

Live 1974 (Grönland)

First of all, the facts. *Live 1974* is a previously unreleased recording by Harmonia, a short-lived, mostly instrumental kosmische pop (they were very rarely rock) band whose membership comprised Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius of Cluster and Neu! guitarist Michael Rother, briefly also a member of Kraftwerk. While the latter two bands' recordings have been exhaustively reissued, revered and dissected, Harmonia's two 'official' albums, the sublime *Musik Von Harmonia* (which *Live 1974* most resembles) and the more Neu!-like *Deluxe*, maintain a quiet, steady presence in fewer record collections. They and Cluster are always your later Krautrock discoveries, mysterious bands whose sweet impersonality feels contradictorily personal and hermetic once it's 'yours'. So this release is a double whammy of the obscurest of the obscure, and a chance for Harmonia's brief oeuvre to be pored over anew. It is also beautiful: dusty, delicate, disconcerting, shifting-sand electronic psychedelic pop music. I guess it doesn't matter for which reason you buy it, as long as you do.

The basic ingredients of Harmonia's music are guitar, DIY-sounding electronic percussion and a selection of keyboard instruments, and its

The transient random joy of a landscape passing by at the speed of machinery

melodic lineage is a mixture of simple pop, minimalist loops and mantra-like, drone-based figures that underpin linear, often lengthy songs.

But Harmonia's exploration of longer-length music, here given freer rein than on their studio albums, is at odds with their Seventies peers' jam-outs and noodle-fests. Instead, as the 17-minute 'Veteranissimo' shows, they're more concerned with long tracks as a vehicle for 'progression' in a more vague, omni-directional sense. 'Veteranissimo' takes a signature Cluster rhythm, a shuffling chug with no discernible 'one', as a basis for melody and timbre to phase around it like weather. Tunes and sounds are added, glitch and fall away, but every growth of gently keening guitar or envelope-filtered, one-handed keyboard is organic and ego-less as a Fibonacci spiral.

Live 1974 was recorded at a sparsely attended show in a former railway station in Greissem, Germany, and the location is apt. It's not just that the off-kilter motorik recalls the clatter of train on track: the fragmentary melodies that slowly strobe through 'Arabesque' seem snatched from memory and lost again, evoking the transient random joy of a landscape passing by at the speed of machinery or the liminal, blissfully *between* territories of station, airport, motorway services.

Harmonia's embracing of the transitory also has the unintended effect of turning the overweening maleness of Seventies experimental rock on its head, something that even the best, most ego-free of the Krautrock bands rarely achieved. There are no riffs, no drums, no grand statements of identity or purpose. Even Michael Rother's heroic, keening guitar solos are more otherworldly voice or bird cry than macho showboating. Every electronic sound has a rounded softness, a communicative, questioning touch. But that's not really what I mean. Dubious essentialism aside, it's more that Harmonia's music reminds me that gender's relationship with music can be one of flux: an ongoing dialogue that's ultimately irresolvable.

Harmonia's music is music I have listened to and listened to. Like the whorl of my own thumbprint, I know it, yet am no closer to explaining why it's there or what it does. Historically, Harmonia were a side-project, a fascinating footnote in a creatively fertile time and place. Personally, they have unobtrusively soundtracked a fair chunk of my life, guiding, hinting, soothing – and reminding me who I am once you get past all the words. The release of this album provides more opportunity for them to keep doing so. Use it well. I know I will.

Dot Allison

Exaltation Of Larks (Cooking Vinyl)

If Dot Allison stole your heart with 1993's *Morning Dove White*, the only album her swoon-house trio One Dove released, the past decade must have felt like a gentle wilderness: two mirage-like records (*Afterglow* and the gutsier *We Are Science*) that pushed only some of the right buttons. But by simultaneously relocating the languor of One Dove and reaching back to the liquid folk of John Martyn and early Traffic,

Exaltation Of Larks starts to realise Allison's long-held promise(s). Songs like 'M' Aidez Call' and 'In Deep Water' are sleepy, soporific. Allison's breathy delivery should frustrate – all intimation and no direction – but instead it coddles, reassures, even at its most emotionally evacuated. Allison sits uncomfortably within pop's barren landscape, and her gestures toward timelessness border on recalcitrant, but *Exaltation Of Larks* is gorgeously indistinct.

Jon Dale

Oren Ambarchi

In The Pendulum's Embrace (Touch)

Anyone else having trouble ignoring the phantom presence of Talk Talk frontman Mark Hollis' evocative tones, which haunt the passages of Ambarchi's recent output for Touch? *In the Pendulum's Embrace* begins much like 2004's *Grapes From The Estate*, the Australian sound-sculptor adding nuance to his recent minimalist approach, painting with the subtlety of brush strokes. Over three episodes, he introduces new elements –

languid strings, bells, glass harmonica and wordless vocals – slowly ushering in skeletal song forms, tender studies in frailty. Each additional colour is dropped in as if from a pipette into a vacuum, appearing just momentarily before its absorption into the sonic whole. While not deviating radically from its predecessor, *Pendulum's Embrace* sees Ambarchi tweak the template to produce a richer, decidedly more confident work.

Spencer Grady

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ALBUM OF THE MONTH JACK PEÑATE Matinée

Out 08.10.07 on XL Recordings
Jack Peñate's talent runs deep, he writes both infectious & intelligent pop songs and with his debut album, he's undoubtedly made one of the most exciting records of the year.



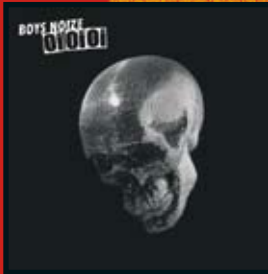
THE BLACK DOG Temple Of Transparent Balls

Out 15.10.07 on Soma
Limited final retrospective from the electronic pioneers including rarities 'Cost I', 'Cost II' & 'Jupiler'



BORDER CROSSING Freedom Of Speech

Out 15.10.07 on Kartel
A diverse odyssey through reggae, soul, hip hop, dancehall & cinematic downbeat, all recognisably Border Crossing in execution.



BOYS NOIZE Oi Oi Oi

Out 01.10.07 on Boys Noize Records
Debut album from Boys Noize aka Alex Ridha, regarded by many as THE most exciting producer around right now, following his remixes for Depeche Mode, Marilyn Manson, Bloc Party, Feist & Kaiser Chiefs.



BUEN CHICO Right To Re-Arrange

Out 15.10.07 on Faith & Hope
Including the sold out singles 'Giving Your Gifts', 'Gold From Lead' & new single 'Choosing My Religion', 'Right To Re-Arrange' is the debut album from fast rising Leeds 3-piece Buen Chico



FELIX DA HOUSECAT Virgo, Blaktro & The MovieDisco

Out 01.10.07 on Different/PIAS
He's one of the biggest name in dance music & he's back with a brand new album that ranks alongside Kittenz & Thee Glitz in terms of quality.



THE FIERY FURNACES Window City

Out 08.10.07 on Thrill Jockey
The sixth album from The Fiery Furnaces is, like rest of their expansive & brilliant repertoire, filled with unexpected pop hooks, sudden tangents & magical ideas. A must have.



FINK Distance And Time

Out 01.10.07 on Ninja Tune
The soulful follow up to last year's 'Biscuits' album, co-produced by Lamb's Andy Barlow, is a bigger, more sophisticated record. Includes 'This Is The Thing', 'Little Blue Mailbox' & 'If Only'.



HARMONIA Live 1974

Out 22.10.07 on Gronland Records
Formed from the crusts of Kraftwerk, Neu! & Cluster, Harmonia are a vital discovery for anyone who thrills in kicking back & nodding out to motorik grooves, proto-ambience & a relentless, euphoric drive.



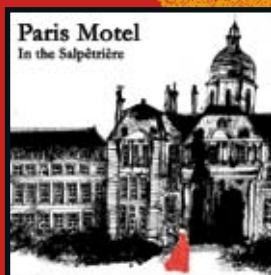
THE HEAVY Great Vengeance And Furious Fire

Out 29.10.07 on Ninja Tune
The Heavy make dirty, guitar scorched voodoo soul - the dark side of four boys from the arse-end of Bath who specialise in making everything wrong sound right.



ILIKETRAINS Elegies To Lessons Learnt

Out 01.10.07 on Beggars Banquet
Continuing their obsession with tragic historical episodes, the album illustrates how history repeats itself & how the human race fails to learn from its mistakes.



PARIS MOTEL In The Salpêtrière

Out 01.10.07 on Loose
Despite the Gallic moniker, Paris Motel are as English as tuppence. Their debut is a haunting collection of tales of magical, mysterious ladies - from pirates & poets to erotic novelists & mediaeval witches.



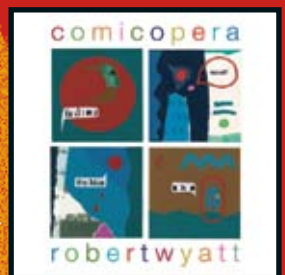
UNDERWORLD Oblivion With Bells

Out 15.10.07 on Underworldlive.com
Underworld return with 'Oblivion With Bells', their first studio album in five years, their fifth to date. The first single 'Crocodile' comes with a number of mixes including one from Pete Heller.



VARIOUS ARTISTS Well Deep: 10 Years Of Big Dada Recordings

Out 15.10.07 on Big Dada
A 2CD compilation of hip-hop label Big Dada's greatest hits including Roots Manuva, Diplo, Spank Rock & many more. All for under a tenner.



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Out 08.10.07 on Domino
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the cosmic inch

Words: **Ralph Cowling**

Illustration: **Overture**

Dance the moonlight fantastic: get hedonistic to the interstellar sounds of Cosmic and Italo disco

Various: *After Dark* (Italians Do It Better)

Various: *Milky Disco* (Lo Recordings)

Lindström and Prinz Thomas:

Reinterpretations/Mighty Girl 12-inch (Eskimo)

Rodion: *Romantic Jet Dance/Electric Soca* 12-inch (Gomma)

Private Lives: *Private Lives* (Soul Jazz)

If I'm going to pinpoint the exact moment of synthesiser disco's rebirth, it would have to be the reissue of Black Devil's 1978 record 'Disco Club'. Re-pressed on Rephlex in late 2004, it inspired an unruly plethora of edits, remixes and reworkings – and even, eventually, Black Devil's return to the stage.

Italo disco itself first emerged in the late Seventies with forerunners like Giorgio Moroder, Claudio Simonetti of Italian prog-rock band Goblin and John Carpenter creating electronically based whirling noises and moody, building synthesiser lines to score film soundtracks. Disco-orientated producers merged the sound with dancefloor-sensibilities by applying the same sounds to a 4/4 beat, gloriously produced open hi-hat samples and some often seriously candyfloss-flavoured good vibes, and it all ended up forming music with a sound better suited to platforms in outer space than to the dance floors of Studio 54.

Three years on from Black Devil's return, Italo disco and its spacier, less overtly poppy cousin, cosmic disco, are back in the ascendant. Mike Simonetti, perhaps better known for pushing skronk and new wave through his Troubleman Unlimited label, is pushing the new sound of synth disco through his Italians Do It Better imprint – check their *After Dark*, which finds former no wave/post-

punks like Chromatics and Glass Candy signing up to the new groove (or rush over to www.allez-allez.co.uk where you can check out Mike's excellent Balaeric Sabbath mix).

Similarly essential is the *Milky Disco* compilation which features all kinds of intergalactic disco music from a selection of artists that reads like a rolodex laid on the desk of modern disco heaven (very possibly that of Jon Tye, Lo's and the record's compiler). Black Devil Disco Club make an appearance, remixing Brooklyn's In Flagranti and making the sound their own, while Morgan

Geist of Italo disco revivalists Metro Area pays

It's swelling, multiple sine-waves, plenty of flanging chords and space sweeps

tribute to the Black Devil sound, appearing under the pseudonym Jersey Devil Social Club. Stand-outs include 'All Flowers Must Fade', the contribution by Daniel Wang of deep house label BaliHu, which opens the album with swelling, multiple sine-waves, plenty of flanging chords and space sweeps, all brought together a shimmering melody that bubbles and pops with disco fizz. Johan Agebjörn brings the gleeful upbeat Italo into the fold with arpeggiators on full whack, collaborator Sally Shapiro's saccharine vocal describing various aspects of being "a spacer woman from Mars". And there's other brilliant tasters – Luke Vibert, in his Kerrier District mask, and a killer Kraut-cosmic crossover track from Padded Cell.

Sadly, one of nu-Italo's leading lights, Oslo producer **Lindström** – appearing here under his

'Six Cups Of Rebel' pseudonym – fails to deliver on this compilation. But this is OK! You can go get hold of his incredible *Reinterpretations*, a collection of spacier reworkings of his earlier work recorded with his friend **Prinz Thomas**. Or at least get hold of the truly mighty 'Mighty Girl' 12-inch, which utilises the physics of a stable piano based build-up with such infectious hypnotic subtlety it'll be lodged on repeat play for weeks without you even noticing it becoming your favourite record.

Munich's Gomma are another label who've left on the stellar disco sound. The jewel in their crown this year is *Romantic Jet Dance* by Italian composer **Rodion**. Mixing Eighties Italo disco sounds with the eerie, orchestrated soundtrack sounds of vintage Italian B-movies and horror films, it's perhaps a little over-polished for my tastes, but undeniably there's some great moments. The LP's stand-out track 'Electric Soca' is also available on 12-inch, with some truly awesome remixes – one by Kaos and a slowed, restrained builder from Cosmo Vitelli, one half of DFA's new Parisian signings Bot'Ox – on the flip.

Finally, another ostensibly great collaboration is the teaming up of Ed DMX and Chris Cylob as the Italo-influenced **Private Lives** to make the new self-titled 12-inch. Hearing about the pair working together makes for an exciting start point, but unfortunately the end result is actually a fairly dull bit of synth-pop: a set of vocodered lyrics are delivered flatly over consistent, descending arpeggiator loops, some acid noodles, and a Gary Numan-style synth line. Amid the straight attack of the track, there are some unnecessarily fiddly pattern edits too, which leave it hanging on the wrong side of fun. It's not bad or anything, just over-embellished; and leaves you feeling a bit cold, like you've just been listening to two lads emulating a robodisco in Berlin for a laugh. With so many good team efforts on Rephlex and similar labels, you probably don't need this. It's perhaps of no real benefit to the record that it doesn't really hit any of the Italo disco nails on their candy-coloured heads, and ultimately that's what I'm all about.



SOLE AND THE SKYRIDER BAND

Sole's official follow up to Live From Rome, and first record with the Skyrider Band - a record marking a return to rhyming, particularly the complicated rhyme schemes that marked Sole's early work, and also a return to the musical consistency and coherence that made the Alias-produced Selling Live Water a critical triumph.

"This is the future of Hip Hop" - Playboy



www.anticon.com soleandtheskyriderband.com www.soleone.org www.skyridermusic.com





Anywhere Out Of The Everything-- the latest (mostly) instrumental full-length from Telephone Jim Jesus. Arriving three years after George Chadwick's auspicious solo debut, Anywhere is a multithued textile of living song that can be admired both for its constituent parts--mini opuses with aural narratives unto themselves--and as a subtly evolving whole.

Featuring appearances from Pedestrian, WHY?, Alias,



Another headnodic-heavy-hitter from the sonic maestro of CLOUDDEAD, an intricately woven audio scrapbook that buzzes with singular experience as lived through the eyes and ears of one very electric human conduit. Here 8-track cassettes, samplers, synths and Dictaphones, lost records and found sounds, field recordings, happy accidents, and more are brought to stirring life by our humble collagist.

Featuring TV On The Radio's Tunde Adebimpe, WHY?, Hood/Bracken's Chris Adams, Jessica Bailiff and more.



The rumors are true. DJ Mayonnaise is, indeed, Still Alive. Eight years after the release of his debut, Anticon's inaugural instrumental LP, Mayo has returned. A fitting follow-up and a reinvention of sorts--While DJ Mayonnaise is still a master of sample and scratch, he's turned his attention to the art of composition and the subtlety of details. And though Still Alive has its moments of quiet, rainy-day beauty, these serve as counterpoints to a brightness that permeates the songs. Simply put, this album, too, is alive.

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OM Pilgrimage

SOUTHERN LORD



burning men

Words: **Abi Bliss**

Illustration: **Ryan Peltier**

Sunburned Hand Of The Man Fire Escape (Smalltown Supersound)

It's an intriguing idea for a get-together. Sunburned Hand Of The Man, the sprawling, shimmering node of New Weird America, assemble in a studio with Four Tet's Kieran Hebden at the controls. The figureheads for turning on, tuning in and freaking out with anyone passing who can shake a tambourine submit to production and mixing by a man whose albums are bejewelled tapestries of intricately stitched samples.

So it happened in March last year and, of course, it's not as simple, nor as polar as that. 'Free' improv is arguably a balancing act between your own urges, musical technique and a finely disciplined hive mind, while Hebden's skill lies with control as a means to a joyously complex end, taking ones and zeros and piecing them together into believable creatures that laugh and cry and dance. From what seems like opposite ends of the methodical spectrum, Sunburned Hand and Hebden meet somewhere in a middle ground

where, to steal a Four Tet title, everything's ecstatic. Incidentally, that's probably what Boredoms' Yamataka Eye was trying to suggest with his jagged, rainbow cover art, although its resemblance to the music within is more by way of something that might be vomited up after an evening spent trying to lick the screen of a Windows Media visualisation.

Anyhow, Hebden soon establishes who's in charge, opening the album with a handful of fast stutter-cuts before 'Nice Butterfly Mask' boogies in, Robert Thomas's plump bassline, the flailing

Think of it as free folk's own party album

brass and queasy fret-slides sounding more like Can recreating a wildebeest's last moments than anything derived from patchouli oil. It's not the only track where the groove dominates: instead of the nursery rhyme Four Tet melodies that litter many an incidental music programmer's shelf, *Fire Escape* punctuates more freeform, meditative moments with tracks such as the title one, which buzzes and shivers and throws up mumbling voices like a particularly paranoid version of your life

flashing before your eyes. Rippling piano and bass nestle peacefully together on 'What Colour Is The Sky In The World You Live In?', under a fluttering canopy of whistles and trumpet (the latter from Vibracathedral Orchestra's Mick Flower) before giving way to a benignly tribal patchwork of snares and bongos on 'The Parakeet Beat'. Meanwhile 'The Wind Has Ears' suggests a meeting between inquisitive Clangers and Tom Waits rendered incoherent by zero-gravity sickness.

Sounds good? Well, yes, most of *Fire Escape* is very good indeed. The problem is that it's rarely either awesome, as in awe-inspiring, or terrible, as in terror-inducing. By remixing and manicuring Sunburned Hand's excursions, Hebden has shaped an album that feels as though it's always at the middle part of the story. His own encounter with drummer Steve Reid on *The Exchange Sessions* revealed that false starts, dead ends and parts where not very much happens are the trade-off for the transcendent moments where everyone's feet leave the ground and the music flies. But that's more a case of hankering after what *Fire Escape* could have been. Think of it as free folk's own party album and chances are you'll be too busy dancing like a tree to care.

Akron/Family

Love Is Simple (Young God)

Simplicity is, Akron/Family agree, to inhale a deep breath and plunge without worry into multi-part choral chaos and patched pastoral arrangements, to let whole-hearted words and yodelling guitars join hands in a haystack of amiable songwriting. Akron speak about love, let it all seep into chords: into melodies, into songs, and warm ones. It's the band's fourth release on Michael Gira's Young God, and while their cultural roots rest firmly in rock's footprints on the other side of the Atlantic – with bands like Creedence Clearwater Revival or The Grateful Dead – natural surprises are plentiful. Tribal drum footsteps appear in

psychedelic back-garden flashbacks, and vocal wahs and incantations make songs slide into jams, harmonies into explosions. Think the wizardry of an organic chemist, experimenting in forested mountains.

Hannah Gregory

in the studio: akron/family

We listened to: "Fleetwood Mac's *Tusk*, the Dead, Boredoms, and Prince."

We watched: "YouTube. Various things, but a lot of Eighties hip hop videos of Sugar Hill Gang dressed up like Egyptian pharaohs and Slic Rick. Also DC Go Go bands like Trouble Funk. And! The mid-Seventies version of 'Isis' by Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue band. We watched that a lot and you should too."

We ate: "Pasta with tomato sauce made by Miles out of tomatoes from Andrew's garden. and lots of Italian stove-top espresso."

(Seth Olinsky, guitar)

Bang Gang DeeJays

Light Sound Dance (Modular)

I had this review half-written before I put the first disc on, recalling the Bang Gang 12-inches that have yet to convince; how the recent dance output from down under has tended to misfire in my headphones – friendly when I crave inhumanity, hairy rather than virtual, and blatant instead of oblique. Then laser met polycarbonate plastic, and I got over myself. Now I'm drinking wine on my bed and I deleted my bad mood except

for the ghosts above. Oh, that stuff still stands – I still need to be convinced, long-term, still suspect this furthest outpost of flou/rave culture is likewise closest to Big Beat in its infernal likeability – but this beyond fun mix is basically straight Puritanicide. It's a sex-crazed, super-nice, ultra-effusive dance-off/love-in for adult cartoons. Randomised pitch-shifting, juvey singalongs and a constant background babble of transplanted hooks and Apple Mac iSpeak raps.

It's more accessible than open heart surgery. It's good time music for, y'know, good, dumb, drunk, nocturnal, animal times. Play chess to something else.

kicking_k



knights of pleasure

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **Graham Corcoran**

Jakobinarina

The First Crusade (Regal)

This is brilliant fun. Maybe it's because I can write this review from the distance of age, that I'm not encumbered with the burden of 'cool', that I can recognise energy and vitriol and passion for what they are, that I can say this. Because, on several levels, this debut album from these brash, good-looking Icelanders is crap – they layer the irony on with a trowel, the hooks and production are way too much in thrall to the *NME* 2007 guitar band zeitgeist, the lyrics are absurdly dumb while being simultaneously self-righteous, the singer has a tendency to slip into passable imitations of his antecedents (notably Mark E Smith and Einar from The Sugarcubes); the music played often slips into cartoon punk à la The Toy Dolls or Die Toten Hosen...but, here's the rub. *It doesn't matter*. Jakobinarina's one instrumental, 'End Of Transmission No 6', is a throwaway sub-Tarantino surf guitar twang

that would embarrass any but the most self-regarding teenager; the guitar on 'Sleeping In Seattle' is borrowed directly from The Smiths; 'This Is An Advertisement' makes its point so heavily that it's cringe-inducing...but, there's the rub. *It doesn't matter*.

For what Jakobinarina have, in trumps, is self-belief, intellect, cynicism towards the places cynicism should always be directed (corporations, TV, other bands, bad house parties), sparkling melodies, a grasp of dynamics undiminished by the run-of-the-mill

Some of my favourite bands are cartoon punks

production, a dark sense of humour...and lyrics. Lyrics aplenty! Nasty lyrics, sardonic lyrics, spiteful lyrics, ridiculous lyrics (I like the moment in 'Monday I'm In Vain' where they pout about how they have nothing to look forward to...except, except, EXCEPT... "Next weekend/Because there will be a dance revolution!"; and also the anti-Icelandic band diatribe 'Jesus', where they yell, "Jump around/Jump around/Jump around/To the

sounds of mediocrity" and it's impossible not to, with such an infectious pogo-beat), meaningful lyrics, meaningless lyrics ('Nice Guys Don't Play Good Music'), anti-convention lyrics ('I'm A Villain', '17')...lyrics everywhere. It's great to hear such a band paying such attention to their lyrics.

Almost all this record's flaws – especially its risibly po-faced, peer-baiting lyrics; and too-bright production – can be traced to Jakobinarina's youthful impetuosity and brashness. But, of course, there's the rub as well. Because all this record's strengths – and they are considerable – can also be traced directly to the band's youthfulness, and their vigour and overriding self-belief, and full-throttle thrust. Give them a couple of years (and a couple of female band members; because they need to learn there's more to life than testosterone and sarcasm) and they could yet mutate into Iceland's answer to The Ex.

It's weird they sing in English, sure – especially when they carp about globalisation on 'This Is An Advertisement' – but hell, all bands like this are a mess of contradictions, and I'm just glad this one is here, today.

Sir Richard Bishop

While My Guitar Violently Bleeds (Locust)

Polytheistic Fragments (Drag City)

Listened to back to back, this double bill from prolific Sun City Girls guitarist and esotericist Sir Richard Bishop adds up to an experience both bountiful and overwhelming: a dazed wander through a labyrinthine bazaar of influence and interpretation.

Containing just three long tracks, *While My Guitar...* starts out with a wiry, hypnotically edgy acoustic improvisation, and is followed by a noise-infused piece for layered, cavernous electric guitar. While Bishop's scuttling acoustic ragas anchor the

album at both ends, it's a treat to hear him upping the chaos: desolate, skeletal electric centrepiece, 'Smashana', keens and clangs like a guitar left to die in a desert, its disintegrating strings scraped only by sandstorms and vultures' claws.

Polytheistic Fragments is more diverse, less holistic – a patchwork of Bishop's pilgrimages around the world's guitar or guitar-related music, with gypsy strumming, perky jazz, country slide, North African oud music and Indian raga put through his intricate, slightly obsessive-sounding style. The recording is beautifully clear and each track is an impressive contrast with the last. But therein (for me) lies the problem: the spooked lap steel of 'Hecate's Dream'

and the folksy, introspective 'Quiescent Return' sit oddly with the swingin' 'Elysium Number Five' or the piano-led meditation 'Saraswati'. Of course, this radio-dial approach is central to the Sun City Girls aesthetic, and *Polytheistic Fragments*'s committed eclecticism will be part of its appeal for many, but those who prefer their music's 'ideas' more implicit or hermetic might find more to appreciate in the more low-key, mysterious Locust release.

Frances Morgan

Blanket

Blankit (Woodland)

You're familiar with this music already: somnambulist, spooky, heavy (light) on the

xylophone and acoustic and accordion and flamenco guitar. It's delicate, beautiful, scratchy. Two boys from Brighton sit and stroke the drums, whisper the melodies, slightly nervous. A girl from London sings, startling in her sombre elation, with sudden shafts of dazzling light piercing the near-biblical gloom.

This is Blanket's debut album; apparently they never rehearse – difficult to believe, so perfectly realised is every song. Think of David Roback's pre-Mazzy Star band Opal, only far more cavernous and still.

You're quite familiar with this sort of music, sure. It doesn't stop it being entirely gorgeous, however.

Everett True



Om Pilgrimage (Southern Lord)

One thing I love about Om – aside from the elephantine interplay of ex-Sleep dudes Al Cisneros and Chris Hakius’ bass and drums; the bewitching drone foundation to every track; the tantric stamina of their live sets; the bizarre lyrics; the lack of guitars – is the way Cisneros forefronts his deceptively basic melodies, and the weird, not-that-slow tempo at which Hakius’ percussion enhances these. Sounds dumb, but it’s worth pointing this out, when the latest wave of doom seems to be assessed (especially in non-metal circles) primarily on its ability to drop a slab of tuneless low-end on you at the slowest possible speed, as if there’s an experimental endurance factor inherent in liking heavy music. I’m down with that, but it’s such a fucking safety net: better to conjure weight by stealth; better to craft your giant edifice from girders of intricate, simple beauty. And this is what Om do – and they’ve done it again with a third album that seems to switch focus thematically from the cosmic to the hagiographic but is never less than seismic, if you get me.

Pilgrimage is no great leap forward from *Variations On A Theme and Conference Of The Birds*, but there is no need for it to be: the band set up camp out in some faraway desert with their first album and have quite rightly stayed there. What is different, perhaps, is an enhanced sense of dynamics: you’ll wait over 10 minutes for the big riff to hit, lolling awhile in the title track’s pool of warm, fluid bass modes and pattering drums. When the heavy stuff hoves into view, it’s like sunrise – licks of light and cloud whipping towards daylight. Throughout, Hakius’ drums maintain a propulsive swing and groove, combining brute force with a lightness of touch. Cisneros’ fluid basslines crunch and glow like past and future, while his compulsive, almost impersonal vocal chants remind you that this is a band utterly in control of their aesthetic: single-minded to the point of monasticism, but equally adept at the kind of visceral physicality that makes some members of their audience wanna take part in dissolution of said monasteries, by force if necessary.

Frances Morgan

Black Dice

Load Blown (Paw Tracks)

Load Blown is a compilation of three 12-inch EPs charting Black Dice’s move from electronic terrorists to slightly more deranged electronic terrorists. Opener ‘Kokomo’ is undanceable dance, a series of space farts. It’s sick and best listened to in short bursts. The calmer ‘Roll Up’ follows, a looping tour of the grave of what might once have been a cheesy psychedelic guitar song. Now it’s probably the sound the Battles album makes if you play it with a broken needle. If it’s improvised it’s a miracle – it builds, moves and is the closest thing here to a pleasant experience. The rest is a predictably terrifying sonic assault, more so because of the brief moments of relief. Like thoroughly disinfecting your brain.

Thom Gibbs

Blood Red Throne

Come Death (Earache)

I can’t sleep at night because of the orange sodium light on the canal towpath outside my bedroom window and when I’ve got the DTs the light shining through the slats onto the wall looks like a giant blazing ribcage. It drives me to distraction. So I can appreciate why most Norwegian bands are so fucking angry all the time, given that it’s daylight there for half a year at a time. (Apart from Annie, who has excellent blackout curtains.)

Blood Red Throne produce an almighty and groovy death metal that would probably sound more at home in the Tampa Bay environs of Florida with its churning, down tuned riffage and larynx shredding growls. On *Come Death*, they eschew the technical advances which have made this once proud genre into a bit of a toothless beast. No triggered drums and no Pro Tools tomfoolery mean the visceral edge of their sound is bloody and intact.

John Doran

Castanets

In The Vines (Asthmatic Kitty)

Y’know, there’s a lot of this around: noise-tarnished alt country, with a dude who sounds like he *really* gets Will Oldham; radio interference crackling through the feedback and dissonance: backing singers who sing off-mic and plaintive like Songs: Ohia over a cumbersome pedal steel and trickling acoustic: words that reference “trouble” and “the blues” with a distinctive twang: drums that roll somehow as if on prairie plains.

There really is way too much of it. But somehow, San Diego native Raymond Raposa rises above the sum of his influences – and man, it hurts how obvious they are – and has made another excellent, evocative album full of distant melancholy and depression. Trust me It even puts me in mind of the master himself, Howe Gelb.

Everett True

Celebration

Celebration (4AD)

I’ve been trying to grapple with what exactly is going on here, but every time I think I’ve got them pinned to the mat, Celebration throw me back to the ropes, leaving me more befuddled then ever. Obviously, this should be a good thing – no-one likes their music to take them for granted – but is it? I really like what I’m hearing, never a 4/4 beat when a crazy tribal thump will do, never 14 chords when two on repeat is all you need, a superbly bolshy female voice slicing through the melee. I guess it’s best likened to that test where you get viciously shocked every time you time you try and grab the delicious cake. Celebration are two guys and a girl from Baltimore, Maryland. They hurt you, but you keep coming back.

The Corpo

in the studio: celebration

We listened to: “Brian Eno’s *Before And After Science*, Fleetwood Mac’s *Tusk*, Brian

Eno and David Byrne’s *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, Horace Andy’s *Dance Hall Style*.”

We watched: “Mostly YouTube videos like Stevie Nicks’ ‘Stand Back’ on *Saturday Night Live*, Popol Vuh’s ‘Bettina’ live, and Frumpy’s ‘Indian Rope Man’, ‘How The Gypsy Was Born’, and ‘Freedom To Fascism’. And we also watched Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *El Topo* and *Holy Mountain*.”

We ate: “Tons of ‘special’ tea. And candy. Only candy.”

Vic Chesnutt

North Star Deserter (Constellation)

Vic Chesnutt is one of those musical auteurs whose consistency sometimes undermines the greatness of his achievements. So don’t let familiarity put you off the sheer luminescent brilliance of what’s on offer here. *North Star Deserter* was some of the last music committed to tape at the legendary original Hotel2Tango studios in Montreal – home, at various times, to Godspeed, A Silver Mt Zion and many more – and it might just be his best album yet. It’s certainly his most spacious.

With help from many of Montreal’s major players and with recordings overseen by legendary US underground documentarian Jem Cohen, not to mention contributions from Fugazi’s Guy Picciotto, Chesnutt serves up characteristically skewed sermons with a confident air that deserves, and effortlessly inspires, your solitary, wonderstruck attention. Highly recommended for those times when you’re alone at the wheel of your own life. Chesnutt is a wise, wily and entertaining co-pilot who’d never knowingly steer you far wrong. File under soul music.

Merek Cooper

The Clientele

God Save The Clientele

(Track And Field)

The cheap microphone sound and four-track creating the hushed whisper vocals on The Clientele’s early singles has been successfully replicated in a quality studio. Continuity issues aside, we can happily warp back to a time when the first Bee Gees album was hip and pointed towards hidden emotional depths (rather than naff stylists). ‘From Brighton Beach To Santa Monica’ either satirises or celebrates gentrified indie pebble-bashing. The lyrics are beautifully ambiguous at times. ‘Isn’t Life Strange’ is classic Clientele in its reflective retro-romanticism. ‘The Garden At Night’ spins psychedelic, moonstruck guitar and ‘The Dance Of The Hours’ is a grand instrumental. The Clientele continue to tug at the sleeve marked ‘favourite’.

Steve Hanson

Damon And Naomi

Within These Walls (20/20/20)

There’s something intimidating about the sombre beauty of Damon And Naomi. It’s not that their new album doesn’t have melodies – man, it teems with them: meticulously planned and delivered with solemn grace, helped along the way by contributions from Michio Kurihara of Ghost, Espers’ string section and the horns of nmperign. Everything lingers. Everything is very stately. Guitar lines trace delicate arcs during ‘The Well’, like classical guitarist John Williams. But it’s all a little *too* serious. Unseemly thoughts creep in during Naomi’s spectral, proggy ‘Stars Never Fade’ – you kind of wish

someone would break wind or something, just to deflate the mood a little. As it is, I’m left strangely unmoved.

I don’t doubt their heart for a moment. It’s their soul I’m concerned for.

Everett True

Nancy Elizabeth

Battle And Victory (Leaf)

Lancashire singer Nancy Elizabeth Cunliffe may arrive with her fingers entwined in a harp, but it’s not so much with Joanna Newsom’s lavish birdsong than with a chill severity more akin to Nina Nastasia that she plucks at hearts. Even as layers of Celtic harp, dulcimer and bouzouki cascade and fragment over swelling harmonies, there’s a sense of emotions framed by restraint, and a kind of plain-spoken poetry to the lyrics that keeps firmly away from river-nymph territory: “*I used to be like a polished penny/But I felt dull like dishwater*,” she sings, in a voice sharing some of Beth Orton’s weary fatalism. It’s folk music full of magic and enchantment, but also the mystery of the recent past: “*Off with your axe and your old tin hat/You’ll come back darker than the night*”.

Abi Bliss

Enon

Grass Geysers...Carbon Clouds

(Touch And Go)

Enon’s winningly lateral approach to songwriting lures you closer via fast or slow bittersweet beauty before executing the indie rock equivalent of a hip throw on yr tender embrace. It would be quite the aggravating fuck-you if not for the multi-coloured, head-circling stars that tend to follow. This, their fifth expo of medicinal confections, maintains overall predictability only in its waywardness – the eccentric pairing of machine gurgles and falsetto of ‘Dr Freeze’, or the marching drums and tender vox of ‘Pigeneration’ for starters. As to the main course GG...CC delivers the usual abundance of hooks as it contorts across a spectrum of concise indie pop that would be anthemic, if not so contentedly eccentric. Enon remain charming, oblique and cute enough to make you think you might finally get that hug – next time. Until then, there’s always the pleasures of a mild concussion.

kicking_k

The Fiery Furnaces

Widow City (Thrill Jockey)

Do The Fiery Furnaces actually go out of their way to be annoying? A loyal few might defend their penchant for following perfectly good records with obtuse conceptual odysseys about their grandmother or dog or whatever, but I challenge anyone not to die a little inside when confronted with ‘The Philadelphia Grand Jury’, the first track on *Widow City*. It’s seven minutes long and mostly consists of a porno bass going ‘scroongg’. It does not bode well for a 16-track album. But the Friedberger siblings really are contrary buggers, and dicking around concluded, they launch into their best record yet. An illogical maelstrom of mutilated folktales, insidious woodwind and searing strings, it teeters dangerously close to the edge of reason. Maybe it jumps off, but it’ll drag you down too. And Eleanor turns in her sweetest vocals yet, a queen commanding vistas of mad, impossible beauty.

Andrzej Lukowski



hollow utopia

Words: **Lauren Strain**

Illustration: **Isabel Bostwick**

Songs from the old Europe: France in decay, Balkan beats and the intoxicating allure of Romany folk

Beirut: *The Flying Club Cup* (4AD)

Alec K Redfearn And The Eyesores: *The Blind Spot* (Cuneiform/Rune)

Matt Elliott: *Failing Songs* (Ici d'ailleurs/Third Eye)

DeVotchKa: *How It Ends* (Cicero Recordings/Epitaph Europe)

Shantel: *Disko Partizani* (Crammed/Essay)

So, **Beirut** – the obscenely gifted Zachary Condon – expels his second child, *The Flying Club Cup*, this month. As demonstrated two years ago, with debut *Gulag Orkestar*, this 21-year-old has an astounding ability to suck traditional Balkan sounds up through a straw, mingle them with the many gentle melodies he stores in his brain-banks and re-eject ‘em in the form of (relatively) enormous sales. In *Plan B* #24, Frances Morgan tutted that, “Every girl I know seems to be in love with this annoying young man and his emo klezmer”; well, readers, apparently he’s gone all French on us this time, so expect some more cardiac overheating. Realistically, the character of this record isn’t far removed from that of its predecessor: there’s little to no difference in the instrumentation, so unless we’re supposed to detect a new aura merely in the titles’ multilingual tendencies or the interjected samples – ‘Nantes’ uses a clip of French telly where people say very GCSE things like “*Qu’est-ce que tu as aujourd’hui?*” – then this proposed shift in cultural engagement is exaggerated.

Condon’s mid-throat tremor remains warm and puppy-eyed for only so long: by the time ‘Forks And Knives (La Fête)’ skulks in, a penchant for multi-layering his own harmonies has become a schtick. Maybe he makes recourse to this safety blanket – lots of Zachs all singing at the same time – because big warbling choruses equals big

lumps in listeners’ throats, but ‘Une Derniere Verre (Pour La Route)’ would be a gloriously simple success if only he let himself be heard in isolation for once. See, people like Beirut because he makes music that sounds like being intoxicated and dewy-eyed on the rooftop of some crumbling bohemian terrace: in Paris, or Bayreuth, or *wherever*, really, so long as there’s a river

meandering in the distance and some drunk Lautrecs getting chucked out of clubs onto the cobblestones below. People *don’t* like Beirut for precisely the same reason: his hazy, indistinctly-worded atmosphere is frustrating in that it hints at history and intimates location but never lets you become immersed: “*No, I was not there, on the church stairs*” he sings, tellingly.

The Flying Club Cup showcases the continued development of Condon’s knack for tapping into a very specific kind of melancholy: a near-sadness rather than a *real* sadness, one pretty enough to be almost ignored. Consequently, his work has a very limited emotive capability, shrewdly tightrope between engagement and security. Having said that, there’s a gorgeous wistfulness to ‘Guyamas Sonora’ matched by nothing on *Gulag Orkestar*, and Final Fantasy’s Owen ‘Tasty’ Pallett does some singing on ‘Cliquot’, which is nice, eh?

‘Queen Of The Wires’ – which opens **Alec K Redfearn And The Eyesores’** release, *The Blind Spot* – is nicer. 3/4 waltzes are danced with slipshod feet while the string family’s daintiest siblings gather in treetops. Alec and Orion eye each other’s presence, harmonising like children. Marisa Nadler’s counter-melody is classically intoned and magically structured, with a careful whist and guile. As the violins unravel and fall gracefully out of love, we choose **Matt Elliott’s** *Failing Songs* for our period of mourning. A raven-haired girl with porcelain

flesh adorns its sleeve; she tends a man in the throes of plague (the coffin behind his hungry skull suggests a dark certainty.) Her gypsyish appearance inverts this almost-orthodox tableau, along with the back cover’s image of a decapitated head being eaten out by weeds. Flowers breed amongst the mildewing body matter; violins whinny, low in the mix but elevated and elemental in pitch. “*We’re free to do exactly what we’re told, we’re free to buy what we’re sold,*” they declare. Anti-capitalist incantations are shadowed by delicious, dissolving guitars; irony leaks through bleeding strings and melodies fragment into disparate beads.

Far less funereal is **DeVotchKa’s** *How It Ends*, in which East meets a different West – seemingly, the lumbering, romantic American prairies. A baritone pattern rolls loyally throughout ‘You Love Me’ and luxurious yawns sweep the plain; hell, ‘The Enemy Guns’ even has lone-swordsman whistles. But don’t grab yer whiskey quite yet, ‘cause Nick Urata’s vocal returns with Romany inflections and the allure of a man offering you phials of potion round the back of the bar. Drinking, you slide into the title track (the star of Michael Arndt’s Oscar-winning *Little Miss Sunshine*) where a stunning vocal glissando gathers into minimal, ballerina pianos. You realise that this is absolutely an album of sunsets: 14 different finales, all fierce, all torched.

How It Ends is supreme proof that this strain of Eastern European-tinged melodrama isn’t all one-two-three down-up-up pumpings of accordion: which is more than you can say for **Shantel’s** *Disko Partizani*. Want a cocksure, flumpy bass? YOU GOT IT. Want lyrics? Check these hotties out: “*My baby came down from Romania, she was the Queen of Taz-a-mania, but now we live in suburbia, without any friends*”. As technically awful as this is, at least there’s a multitude of holidaying types shouting “*Ey! Ey! Ey!*” – and sometimes, this is exactly the kind of life you’d like, if only for approximately eight minutes. Dear Zachary, I take it all back. Please walk me home, ‘cause this bloke with wraparounds and a terrifying facial cornucopia is dribbling all over the table. Yours apologetically, Lx



panning for gold
Words: **Hannah Gregory**
Illustration: **Anke Weckmann**

Devendra Banhart

Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon (XL)

It makes me sad to become more cynical. Three years ago, when I listened to the iridescent strains of *Niño Rojo*, didn't I write of enchantment and magic and the exotic foreignness of the bearded minstrel's irresistible aura and oddball folk? Now, if I see tangles in his guitar strings; now, if I pick holes in his inland shanties, is it because of the ego-inflated entourage that surrounds his wilful bohemia – the career-boasting press release, the 'new weird' labels, the compilation rounds – or is it because the music doesn't stand up, with, or without, the stigma attached? Two years back, when he played after Dirty Three at the Astoria, of course he appeared the lesser musician: then I could see beyond his seductive eyes and friendly forearm freckles. But didn't those songs from *Niño Rojo* swim around my head for aeons? They did, and I suspect that some of these will also.

Oh, I hate how he still somehow manages to charm. It's partly the equatorial mysticism; how

He's drunk – on Gabriel García Márquez, revolution or the midday sun

he sings in slurred Spanish like he's been sipping at maté, as his fourth album reclines into swirled smoke and ash-breathed consonants. There's an arrogant swagger, not unlike Lou Reed's on *Berlin* – recorded, though this was, tucked up on the hills above LA, in a studio overlooking the canyon, with Noah Georgeson, Vetiver man Andy Cabic and a rally of spirit-rousing bandmates. You want to dislike it, cos you suspect that he's bad though his eyes seem kind, his lullabies hiding sentiments more sinister than soothing.

But in the first part, the songs do stand up alone. The nocturnal 'Rosa' comes on like a sweet love serenade that could just as easily send your baby into jasmine-scented dreams as murmur murder ballad credentials – I can't tell for translation. English is his second tongue, picked up at the same time those spidery hands learnt guitar, and if it were down to my preference I'd beg that he stayed true to his Venezuelan childhood roots. I'd beseech that he strode in step with the Tropicalia rhythms that pepper

'Samba Vexillographica' and 'Carmencita', that'll have you essaying tango hip-flicks and jazz fingers and re-finding Gilberto Gil – and that he gave the affected braggadocio that hangs over from *Cripple Crow* a miss. Stick with the sultry stunners like opener 'Cristobal', try the Fifties feel and peaceful grass-skirt well-wishing of 'Shabop Shalom', if he will; but forget the rock heritage of his formative US-residing years – as strutted across 'Seahorse', a bizarre hoe-down in the key of Jefferson Airplane – and I'll still be his.

There's room for editing, after all; by the time we're at track 10, 'Saved', a celebratory gospel number, it all feels too much, overdone, and still going on (to 16 multifarious tracks). It's a bit like he's trying to pay tribute to all his influences at once. Yet I imagine his sauntering guitar patterns, drunk on Gabriel García Márquez, revolution or the midday sun, will continue to charm quite a few, nonetheless, and that at least a smattering of these songs will echo in late summer footsteps well beyond the season's end.

The Go

Howl On The Haunted Beat You Ride (Cass)

Ploughing a more melodic furrow than in the days Jack White clanged guitar for them, *HOTHBYR* is a commendably authentic homage to The Beatles and the Flamin' Groovies. The Detroit gang have not withered, exactly, churning out tuneful ditties, all sprightly bass lines and perfect harmonies. On a good day, they sound like 13th Floor Elevators. But on a bad day, they sound like Cosmic Rough Riders (you're lucky I didn't say Ocean Colour Scene). Basically, there are two problems. 1) CDs don't crackle properly. 2) The Go don't kick ass any more.

Hayley Avron

Michael Hurley

Ancestral Swamp (Gnomonsong)

The 'discovery' of Michael Hurley in the mid-Sixties was part of the Folkways Records' drive to find and preserve the folk music of the US, so it's apposite that he's been discovered anew by the equally curious bands of this century – I first heard about him via Espers, and this album is released on Devendra Banhart's label, with guest spots from Tara Jane O'Neil among others.

Hurley's intimate, quietly moving songs are more than equal to his cult status. *Ancestral Swamp* moves seamlessly through blues, folk, cowboy songs and Hurley's own lilting compositions with visionary unselfconsciousness, while guitar, banjo,

fiddle, voice and occasional piano knit a warm, frayed coverlet for tales of gamblers, pine trees, rivers and graveyards, shot through with a sense of the unearthly and surreal that's hard to quantify. And scattered between the spooked fiddle drones of 'Gamblin' Charlie' and the ominous, tough fingerpicking of '1st Precinct Blues', there's an easy sweetness to songs like 'When I Get Back Home' that brings to mind Banhart's own earliest and most charming lo-fi recordings. That the sixtiesomething Hurley's spontaneity, humility and lightness of touch still resonates with every note he emits is perhaps a lesson some of our new young folk generation would do well to take on board.

Frances Morgan

Mr Huw

Llond Lle O Hwrs A Liadron (Copa)

The title means 'Loads of Whores and Pirates'. 'Cyfflwyniad' comes on like Beck, or Sebadoh without the minor key undertones and an almost glitter-beat upness, while 'Ni Gyd' could be a Welsh Hefner. The flowering recognition of Welsh language since the Seventies coincided with the rise of pop counterculture, the glib end of which is *Twin Town* and clichés about heading down the local Spar for Rizla 10 minutes before closing time. But there's a more rarified otherness to 'Artist Solo', the most majestic, psychedelic track here. That this record blurs out of BBC radio is nothing short of wonderful.

Steve Hanson

The mid-point where Olympia Riot Grrrl sexuality meets Glaswegian charity store chic



princess charming

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **Iain Paxton**

The Royal We

The Royal We (Geographic)

"The world would be all wrong if Everett True wasn't into The Royal We. You can trust me on this. I'm an expert. The Royal We – six young idealists who came together in Glasgow in early 2006, drawn by that city's musical lineage of Orange Juice, Belle And Sebastian, and yes, The Pastels – sound like Jonathan Richman, early Go-Go's and Aislers Set. Relocated Californian singer Jihae Simmons bounces and sings unashamed like Belinda Carlisle before she went all poolside on us. These are all massive plus points. The backing harmonies are all Shangri-La's "woo-eee-wooo's" and sporadic, shouted "all rights", with a little Ramones "gabba gabba" thrown in. Of course, these are massive plus points. The music is glam on the cheap; some tinny keyboards and over-layered guitars that recall Eighties Edinburgh pop crushes The Fizzbombs and Sxties beach party records and the sort of thing that was prevalent everywhere in 1980 but never ever rehabilitated: female-led power-pop (we're talking Martha And The Muffins, the first Tourists single, The Passions... and a thousand lesser-known acts). And yes, that's wonderful.

Of course it would be. The world wouldn't be worth existing in if Everett True wasn't into The Royal We. You can trust me on this. I'm an expert. The Royal We – six young idealists who came together in Glasgow in early 2006, drawn by that city's musical lineage of Orange Juice, Belle And Sebastian, and yes, The Pastels – sound like Jonathan Richman, early Go-Go's and Aislers Set. Relocated Californian singer Jihae Simmons bounces and sings unashamed like Belinda Carlisle before she went all poolside on us. These are all massive plus points. The backing harmonies are all Shangri-La's "woo-eee-wooo's" and sporadic, shouted "all rights", with a little Ramones "gabba gabba" thrown in. Of course, these are massive plus points. The music is glam on the cheap; some tinny keyboards and over-layered guitars that recall Eighties Edinburgh pop crushes The Fizzbombs and Sxties beach party records and the sort of thing that was prevalent everywhere in 1980 but never ever rehabilitated: female-led power-pop (we're talking Martha And The Muffins, the first Tourists single, The Passions... and a thousand lesser-known acts). And yes, that's wonderful.

The world would indeed be wrong if I didn't like this. For The Royal We exist on the exact mid-point

where latent Olympia Riot Grrrl sexuality meets Glaswegian charity store chic. Single 'All The Rage' (the one with the aforementioned "all rights") fizzles and stains like a gallon of home-made blackcurrant cordial – good for you and slightly tart, and never, ever sickly. 'Back And Forth Forever' makes like The Bobby McGees before rocking into Diskettes doo-wop territory. 'Three Is A Crowd' rocks, like Ric Ocasek. The lyrics are (shrugs)... who cares what the lyrics are about (although I note they've got the innate good sense to name one song 'I Hate Rock 'N' Roll'). What you need to know is that The Royal We are chirpy and sassy, and you hardly need to watch the videos of them on YouTube to know that they bounce like Beth Ditto.

Jihae, Roxanne, Patrick, Graeme, Joan and Colin are like the dream band from *Ladies And Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains*. It's like they've managed, for just over 20 glorious minutes, to tap into the precocious swagger of continental riot-sters Hello Cuca or Orange Juice or The B-Girls (remember 'Fun On The Beach?'), the sort of attitude that was so rampant in independent pop music before the damn Smiths and serious dickheads like House Of Love took over and ruined everything. No wonder folk like Franz Ferdinand love The Royal We. The Royal We contain an innocence within their sound, a pure love for pop music, that they can never hope to recapture.

I know all this makes them sound as twee as fuck... but fuck it. Were The Go-Go's twee, The Aisler Set, *The Pastels*...? Hmm?

This is so pop, it's genius. But be quick! Catch them now. In December, Jihae is moving back to LA and The Royal We will be no more...

Everett True speaks to Roxanne Clifford

How did this album come about?

"It was more like a gang than a band initially, more about hanging out together, listening to records and having fun. We would go to someone's flat and just use a guitar, sing the melodies and clap and hit things. We played our friend Anna's party in a condemned basement flat, which we decked out to look like a boat. All but a couple of our songs were written within the first couple of months of the band's existence and were very spur of the moment, so I guess that this album encapsulates that time, before the love affair came to an end. Not that we don't still love each other."

What's your definition of pop music?

"Usually the first album, when a band first gets together and it's not too thought through or analysed. The music you love unselfconsciously as a child, stray from when you find 'proper' music when you become a teenager, return to ironically later on and finally embrace wholeheartedly when you realise you'd rather listen to 'Smalltown Boy' (and get choked up by it) than Stockhausen."

Jihae is moving back to LA in December, and The Royal We will be no more. How do you feel about this?

"The Royal We was fleeting but it was never supposed to exist any longer than it did, we'd all realised this quite a while before Jihae's decision to move back home. We're lucky to have a document of that brief period where it worked and we will hold it in our hearts forever. Just so happens that we have the advantage of never having to bring out a second album that's never as good as the first."

iLiKETRAiNS

Elegies To Lessons Learned (Beggars Banquet)

In the grand tradition of very serious young men making very serious music for other very serious people, iLiKETRAiNS excel themselves like (but nothing like) The Walker Brothers and Joy Division before them.

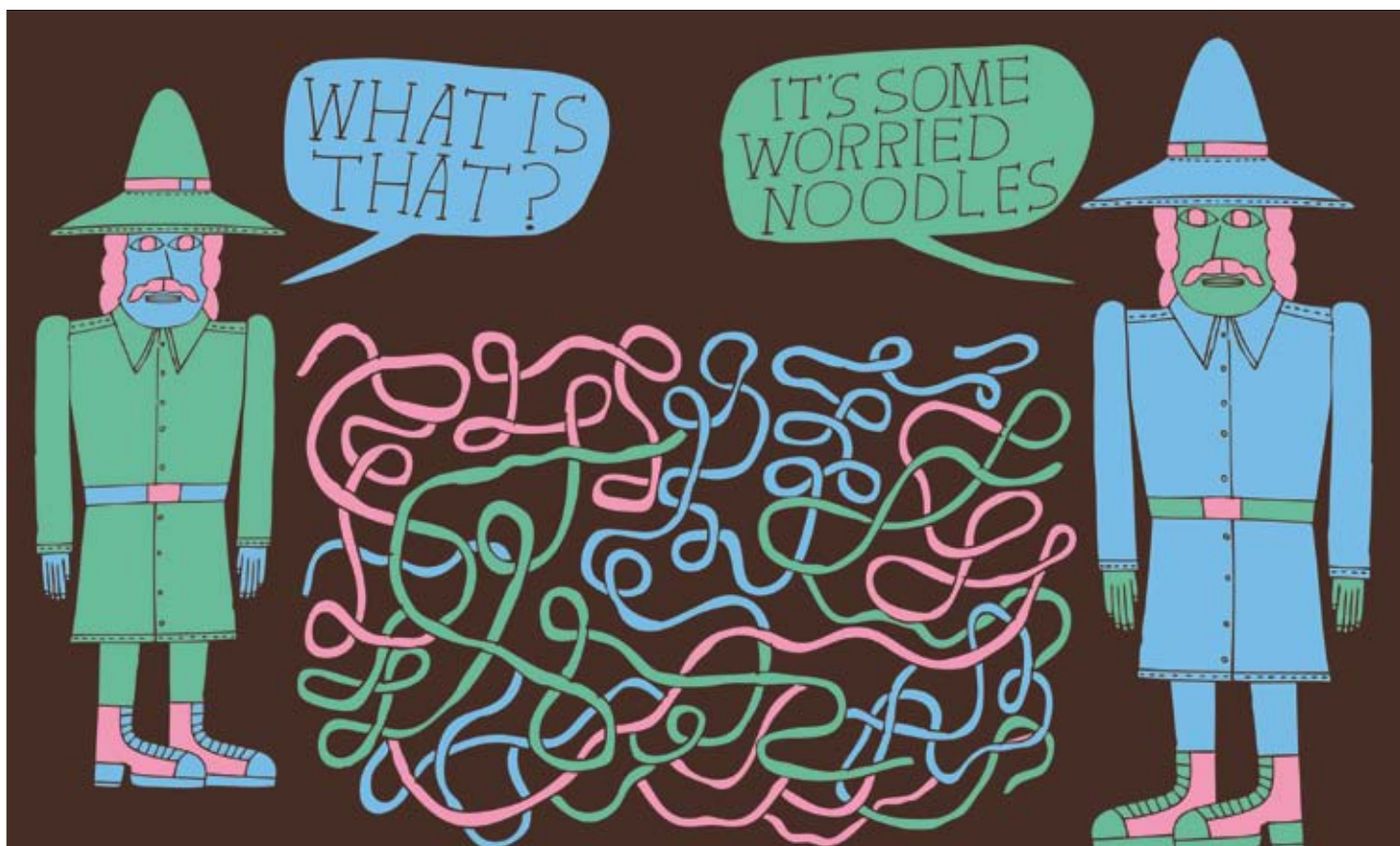
Elegies To Lessons Learned, their first album proper, is a collection of musings on the one universal truth, refracted through the tales of nine historical figures, some well known (assassinated British Prime Minister Spencer Perceval) and others less so, like 19th Century military surgeon William Brydon, and Donald Crowhurst – a cheat who, in

1969, was about to become the first man to circumnavigate the globe non-stop by yacht in the Sunday Times Golden Globe Race, when he achieved "an understanding" of the theory of relativity and drowned himself to free his mind from his body.

The band's elegant, sepulchral and minimalist guitar work and David Martin's

stentorian intonations suit their subject matter well. Said subject matter being, ultimately, that death is inevitable, it will certainly not be pleasant, but there can be beauty and much to gain in iLiKETRAiNS' raging against the dying of the light.

John Doran



sounds sketchy

Words: Nicola Meighan
Illustration: Marcus Oakley

David Shrigley

Worried Noodles (Tomlab)

Various

Puppy Love (Tomlab)

"The disabled lad wants you to buy him a wheelchair with the money that you won at the horse race".

Three gospel truths, according to Shrigley – saviour of harebrained, humdrum poetry and potted, twisted, kitchen-sink Jackanories: blackcurrant jam is the nicest jam; mistakes have been made in the creation of some humans; there is joy to be had in buying cheap goods abroad.

Such wily aphorisms were scrawled across the scrabbly art knave's so-called 'debut album' *Worried Noodles* (2005) – an abnormally ace circus of the cute, the grotesque, the banal. Of mongrel dogs and skulls in boxes. Pigs covered in bees and ram-raiding junkies. Ten-year-old quadriplegic pimps. But despite its jittering idiom and general genius, there was something amiss from Shrigley's inaugural album: tunes.

Now said anthology of breviloquent narratives, unschooled cartoons and awry poetry has been aurally interpreted and resurrected by the likes of Les Georges

Harebrained, humdrum poetry and potted, twisted, kitchen-sink Jackanories

Leningrad, Mt Eerie, TV On The Radio and The Curtains. So, Liars unleash a hyper echo-techno rendition of 'Panic Button'. David Byrne champions the cocks and the prostitutes in the butt-naked 'For You'. Deerhoof launch a thousand chimes in minimalist springboard 'You Dog (AKA Kidz Are So Small)'. Final Fantasy gets jiggy with marriage and Visage on the iridescent 'Joys'. Grizzly Bear perform 'Riders On The Storm', as revised by your granny, on 'Blackcurrant Jam'. Meanwhile, Scout Niblett's magnetic, raggedy charms have rarely sounded finer than on slacker lullaby 'The Bell' – a cautionary tale of a hapless rock star whose head gets punched off by a 12-foot monster.

Worth particular note, however, is Casiotone For The Painfully Alone, whose 'The Pretty Girl' unfurls like exquisite rigor mortis. It's a barren, distorted, piano ballad – as recounted by a psychopathic necrophiliac. Never has a serial killer evoked such poignant empathy. But if *Worried Noodles* Mk II equally serves as Shrigley showcase and ace sonic compendium, so too does it provide an exposition through divergent artistic interpretation. Compare, for example, the polar treatments of 'No', by Franz Ferdinand

and Hot Chip respectively: one is an angular Gang Of Four stride; the other is a cruise-ship reworking of Roxy Music's 'Jealous Guy'.

It's a tribute to record imprint Tomlab's manifesto of imagination and creative freedom that such a project has come into fruition: while *Worried Noodles* Mk I both evoked and overturned the conceptual art and commodity infatuation of post-punk's DIY dandies, Shrigley's tune-lubed, excellent successor staunchly affirms both our protagonist's mettle as singular lyricist, and Tomlab's calibre as vital independent label.

Ten years on from its inception, the Koln-based endeavour still thrives and inspires, as a snapshot of *Puppy Love* – a celebration of Tomlab's first decade – swiftly testifies: Final Fantasy, Erase Errata, The Books, Deerhoof, The Blow, Xiu Xiu, Les Georges Leningrad and Patrick Wolf are among its gleefully deviant electronic pop flock: from the furtive bedroom arias of Casiotone For The Painfully Alone, to the livid synth chorales of Misha and Hey Willpower – via the malformed, incandescent mind of David Shrigley – Tomlab's current crop suggests their coming years in double figures are set to herald twice the joy.

Konono No 1

Live At Couleur Café (Crammed Discs)

Time once more to crank up the amplified likembés for another dose of distortion-fuelled African trance-dance from the Democratic Republic of Congo's favourite proto-techno ravers. Fresh from their cameo appearance on Björk's 'Earth Intruders' single, Konono make like they're planning to saturate the market with their third release; a live recording of unreleased pieces

and old favourites taken from their performance at Brussel's popular Couleur Café Festival. Konono's brand of 'Congotronics' is best sampled in the flesh, their propulsive primitivism conjuring gymnastic rhythmic for the feet and booty, so maybe it's inevitable this recording fails to convey all the seething energy of their live displays. Rather we are offered eight fairly homogenous percussive and vocal workouts; representations of a group who, in full flight,

can bedazzle audiences with their effortless vibrancy. Save your pennies for the next time Konono take to a stage in your town.

Spencer Grady

Land Of Talk

Applause Cheer Boo Hiss
(One Little Indian)

The somewhat obvious comparison to Metric (I didn't know they were Canadian! I swear!) is somewhat unavoidable. But it doesn't do

Land Of Talk justice. Where Metric operate on a plateau, Land Of Talk duck and dive through your heartstrings and Elizabeth Powell's lyrics drawing a wry smile, where Emily Haines' would just wash over you.

"Look at those girls, so young, so young, still piss their pants..." Delivered with a raised eyebrow and a dimple in the cheek, it's a sophisticated take on Courtney's age-old ramblings about the 'pee girl' in her school class. In fact, Land Of Talk is a sophisticated



beyond belief

Words: Noel Gardner

Illustration: Jussi Brightmore

High On Fire

Death Is This Communion (Relapse)

It's pretty damn rare to find someone who hates High On Fire. People who've never heard of them, or people who hate heavy metal – these are in abundance, obviously; but the amount of common-or-garden goodwill and general critical frottage the Oakland trio generate is overwhelming. They've never particularly looked like making the commercial stepup to even the level of, say, Mastodon or Lamb Of God, and *Death Is This Communion*, their fourth album, needn't be burdened with the expectation of that changing.

Man alive, though, does it ever sound massive. Jack Endino, a producer most often associated with the grunge heyday, goes above and beyond tweaking those dials; you can hardly imagine the result being closer to what the band envision in the vertical-axe battle fantasies in their collective head. 'Fury Whip', the opening track, isn't especially representative in this regard: it's got that road-tested Motörhead-y corroded-nose feel, Matt Pike smoking Lemmy's vocal cord nodules in trademark manner, but delivered with the half-coherent, smog-choked anger of

Ursine rivetheads channelling proto-black metal and olde tyme thrash and doom

a thousand crust-punk bands with clothes made out of patches. (A couple of Pike's previous groups, Asbestos Death and Kalas, plough this territory in more literal fashion, and are worth investigating for the curious.)

It's quite tempting to pursue this dot-joining exercise into the heart of the album; the musical history High On Fire draw from, set against the demographics you might find getting down to them, is at least worth taking note of. Three ursine rivetheads channelling Venom, Bathory and other proto-black metal, olde tyme traded-tape thrash and doom, self-released NWOBHM seven-inches, the aforementioned Motörhead and Celtic Frost (especially Celtic Frost) to an audience containing at least a scattering of curious post-rock types and restless mainstream metal kids. And being afforded picture reviews in *Plan B*. Anyway, to emphasise the joined dots would imply a plotting cynicism at work that in no way shows itself on this terrific record.

It would be remiss to pretend I knew what these songs were about: Google, the reviewer's friend, suggests that the album title is the band's own, syntactically peculiar, creation. Let's settle for assuming that whatever's going on in the lyrics probably

wouldn't be much fun if it was happening to you. See, Iron Maiden and Megadeth (for example) never endorsed war, they merely wrote a shedload of songs about it, but they delivered it with such extensively puffed chests and acute sense of *grand guignol* that they are, or were, often thought of as trouble-free Good Time Music. High On Fire enjoy a similar duality, playing music of such triumphalism that even their Jandek covers album would probably end up sounding pretty much like this.

There is a track, 'Headhunter', consisting solely of a drum solo, which feeds into the giant 'Rumors Of War' and only breaks off from its punishing tattoo to deliver the album's one moment that might be deemed 'psychedelic', specifically a Neil Young-joins-Slayer guitar sunburst. Oh, the leaden folk intro to 'Cyclopan Scape' might count if you were rooting for evidence that Matt Pike, the man who cast a mountainous shadow over stoner rock in Sleep, had an inner hippy that he couldn't shake.

Why you'd want to do that, while faced with one of the more celebratory – and celebration-worthy – things to happen to metal in recent times, is a mystery.

take on not-so-distant American musical history, ravaging elements of Throwing Muses, Juliana Hatfield, Pixies, et al but cleaning them up and honing the rage into cutting soundbites. Slick but full of vigour; polished but full of surprises; melodic, with just the right dose of brutality.

It's been a while since Cupid struck a direct hit with an unknown album but this is right on target.

Hayley Avron

Jens Lekman

Night Falls Over Kortedala
(Secretly Canadian)

Oh, Jens. He sings about love. Or rather broken, bruised love. In a manner that is almost joyous, danceable, at some times euphoric, at all times gorgeous. Moving on from the bedroom singalongs of *You're So Silent*, Jens, this record is infused with swelling orchestration, mixing the epic grandeur of strings with folk ballads and

dance beats, smothered in the warm tones of Jens' crooning. The album tells of years in a lonely suburbia, of flickering lights, small town ghosts, sleeplessness and repetition. His confessional tone that so often leads to comparisons to Stepin Merritt is tangled with melodrama, love songs dream about red lips and dusty moments: "I'm so sorry I couldn't love you enough". The stories are never simple, infused with gentle humour, misunderstanding and farce, best displayed

in the wonderfully tragic-comic 'Postcard To Nina'. There are plenty of borrowed moments, nods to predecessors; he wears his influences, like his heart, on his sleeve. But this we can forgive. Jens might be a hopeless romantic, declaring to "Never kiss anybody that doesn't burn me like the sun". But even as he winds things up here with a jolty summer doo-wop, his words still tremble with passion and potency.

Emily Graham



Lou Reed/Zeitkratzer Metal Machine Music (Asphodel)

These days Lou Reed's proto-noise masterpiece is rightfully regarded as a serious creative statement – rather than a contract-defying prank – but it's only now, with this radical reimagining, that it joins the lofty pantheon of high art.

Ulrich Krieger, saxophonist with 11-piece classical ensemble, Zeitkratzer, has performed a minor miracle by transcribing feedback squalls and amp hums into an acoustic score for live performance – and the transformation is astounding. Manically stridulated violins and cello recreate the shrill, high-end shrieks but there's a deeper, richer sound here too, given extra heft by booming percussion and brass. As the DVD shows, what it loses in terms of psychedelic head-melt, it gains in grand ritual splendour, with the stone-faced ensemble sweating, straining, almost sawing their instruments in half as they work up great swirling clouds of aural psychosis. It's fascinating, too, how easily this new work slots into a genuine avant-garde lineage, recalling not just the drone-epics of La Monte Young that influenced Reed in the first place, but also the vertiginous peaks and angles of Xenakis and Varèse's ominous rumblings. At the finale, Reed contributes a brief, pulsing noise-out on electric guitar. While it's a slightly redundant, crowd-pleasing gesture – and fails to match the immersive brain-wipes of later guitar-noisicians like Skullflower – it's hard not to feel some awe for the man who pretty much invented noise 32 years ago.

Daniel Spicer

Samara Lubelski

Parallel Suns (The Social Registry)

Samara Lubelski has quite a pedigree when it comes to the weird American folk-noise scene. Previous collaborations with Jackie O-Motherfucker, MV and EE, Double Leopards and Religious Knives as well as her violin contributions on Thurston Moore's new solo album are testament to that. So it's a surprise to find this to be a quite straightforward little record full of perfect little pop songs, reminiscent of the more delicate entries in Joe Boyd's Witchseason roster from the late Sixties/early Seventies. If Vashiti Bunyan had moved to NYC in 1972 to record a more pristine follow-up to *Just Another Diamond Day*, this may well have been the result. Organ and strings weave sunny patterns around a cycle of songs imbued with nature springing ever eternal.

Euan Andrews

Amy Macdonald

This Is The Life (Vertigo)

Between KT Tunstall, Sandi Thom and East Neuk unsung lung-seductress Cora Bissett jangles Glasgow's Amy Macdonald. She cites Travis as an influence, she misfires with wistful homages (not least the quick-fire accordion-shamble of 'Barrowland Ballroom'), and she veers dangerously close to Cranberries turf on undulating stadium-warbler 'This Is The Life' (which dubiously redeems itself, incidentally, by too evoking Alphaville's 'Big In Japan'). Don't hold any of this against her, however: Macdonald's recent single, 'Mr Rock And Roll', is a bombastic regional radio classic. Her AOR charm's fantastic. She's going to be massive.

Nicola Meighan

Numbers

Now You Are This (kill rock stars)

That dirty, Moogy distorto-organ sound, so resonant of chemical-fuelled street punks in old John Carpenter films, is slathered all over *Now You Are This*. It's the first thing you hear, a one-finger hold-down before opener 'New Life' powers out the future punk throttle. Drummer Indra Dunis's vocals consist of little more than the song title cooed repeatedly over the accelerating auto-destruct chaos and it brings a lump to my throat, an anthem for days where a new life means crashing

into a brick wall. Dunis's sweet lilt is in perfect juxtaposition with Dave Broekema's guitar dissonance and Eric Landmark's swelling keyboard army; the maelstrom is always perfectly judged while seeming on the precipice of final collapse. The CD cover shows Dunis staring into a blinding white light. Perhaps it is the *Daydream Nation* candle burning her eyes out.

Euan Andrews

Octoberman

Run From Safety (White Whale)

Marc Morrissette spins tales of travel across a surreal landscape. He's done the backpacker trail, and brought back distorted apparitions and minute observations, lovingly documented within the settings of a waltzing band, who play it serene in 'By The Wayside', but crash into the chorus of 'Run From Safety' with apocalyptic fervour. Also, though, there's a campfire feeling here that's endearing, like how the Animal Collective's hazy output would sound if they were reared on Steinbeck and The Band instead of sweets and the Sun City Girls; both homely, and exotic. The melodies don't always amaze, but the feel of this album is so good it takes over its environment and brings a sense of calm. Better than a Glade plug in.

Jonathan Falcone

Okkervil River

The Stage Names (Secretly Canadian)

Remember *Black Sheep Boy*, Okkervil River's last album? Based around Tim Hardin's song of the same name, it sounded like crimes in the forest, a poison dart in your toughened hide. But where its narrative returned, obsessively, to a central figure that endlessly consumed and regurgitated itself, new release *The Stage Names* has tracks like a scissored reel of Polaroids. On first listen, it's the world in fast-forward: colours sludge to brown whilst the noises of a travelling circus smudge into one attention-deficit squeal. With each replay, characters emerge. "Cindy tells me she's had fun/ Sitting backstage, someone's plus one," sings Will Sheff – but rather than leave her here, make-up crumbling, he follows her home: she gazes at the turntable, with only records for company. You reach into the picture, and hold hands.

Lauren Strain

Patton Oswalt

Werewolves And Lollipops (Sub Pop)

Soon to be ubiquitous for his voice part in Pixar's *Ratatouille*, Patton Oswalt's real job is stand-up. If 2007 is the start of his mainstream acting phase, he's quitting the day job at his peak. Reference points are obvious (*Star Wars* Episode 1, Paris Hilton, KFC), but his eloquence in dismantling each is unparalleled. A popular dish at the latter is "a failure pile in a sadness bowl". His less-enraged-than-David Cross delivery is just the right side of endearing, which occasionally allows him to be fucking mean. On unwanted pregnancy he gets away with: "You will pay a skinhead to kick your girlfriend in the stomach". Horrifying and dumb on paper, hilarious in context. Some sub-par Bush-bashing aside, *Werewolves* is the best-paced and most rewarding comedy record you'll hear this year.

Thom Gibbs

Ewan Pearson

Piece Work (!K7)

There aren't many producers who avoid pigeonholing with as much panache as Ewan Pearson. Halfway between minimal and disco, at once precise and spaced-out, deep and bombastic, he makes most dance bods look woefully compartmentalised. He's already made one of the finest mix albums of the year for Fabric, and now this collection shows off his talent for remixes. It's stretched across two CDs, and to be sure there's skippers – but there are also a great many brilliant moments. The 15-minute 'Disco Odyssey' mix of Goldfrapp's 'Ride A White Horse', for example; or his take on Cortney Tidwell's 'Don't Let Stars Keep Us Tangled Up', both tender and cosmic, which is easily one of the best things released this year.

Robin Wilks

Pfaff

If This Is The Last I'll Do (pfaff.musicweb.nl/pfaff/)

This album comes on a USB stick. Amid numerous confusing files, all titled in Dutch, is a selection of Dutch poetry, a couple of incomprehensible videos (mostly crowd banter), some weird, deadpan instructions – and, yeah, this music. The sound is typically schizo: weird voiceover cabaret next to grungy funk overload (um, if Pavement were funk), playing next to chugging scary Goth and a Nineties version of Northern Soul. Voices alternate between brittle, sarcastic English and rampant Dutch, music lies somewhere between Comet Gain, The Ex and someone from Glasgow (not Wet Wet Wet). There's whistling, melody lines that switch erratically from speaker to speaker, a sumptuous keyboard and a song called 'Tigger'. Yes, you could say I like it.

Everett True

Pinback

Autumn Of The Seraphs (Touch And Go)

Americans who can play their instruments kinda fast right now seem to be involved in an interminable competition that can only be won by including the most outlandish time signatures into one song. Pinback do that complex thing too, but they're not running this race. Rob Crow's crew are talented and mathy, but also delicate and sleek. Secretly aggressive opener 'From Nothing To Nowhere' is propelled by an unadorned, unfussy rhythm section. 'Subbing

For Eden' has neat interlocking vocals which quietly assert authority over a Spoon-ish backing. Occasionally, they're so musically relaxed as to be almost pulseless, but with *Autumn Of The Seraphs*, they've made a charming make-out record. Shame the artwork looks alarmingly like the work of a bored Goth, and that someone's had a Billy Corgasm all over the lyric sheet.

Thom Gibbs

Pony Up!

Make Love To The Judges With Your Eyes (Laughing Outlaw)

In defiance of all conventional wisdom regarding bands with exclamation marks in their names, Pony Up! are really very depressing. So depressing, in fact, that they have a song entitled 'The Truth About Cats And Dogs (Is That They Die)'. Still, let's call the punctuation police off on this one: you'd have to be frighteningly jaded to sneer at a record so disconsolately lovely as the Montrealers' debut. Dunking the diamond melancholy of prime Neil Young into a frigid pool of girl group melodies and rickety Eighties production, *Make Love To The Judges With Your Eyes* is not exactly laden down with different shades and colours. But live with it a bit and it's like watching crystals grow: gently, unstoppably beautiful.

Andrzej Lukowski

Pram

The Moving Frontier (Domino)

Who wants to want to hear Bond themes and wonky beats, ripped up synths and Raincoats-esque languishing, bubbling alongside a sci-fi soundtrack that segues into something that wouldn't sound lost if you played it next to the theme from *Love Story*? I hate to sound like a cliché, but Pram might well be just the band for you. Fearless of the constricts of genre (despite showing up, bewilderingly, as 'Jazz' when you slide it into your iTunes box), *The Moving Frontier* is the type of album for which the phrase 'expertly crafted' was invented. The one anomaly is Rosie Cuckson's voice, a slightly drunken, somewhat cocky Jane Birkin for the impatient age. Off-kilter enough to stand out but in tune enough to make it work, her voice picks up the edge of the musical rug and shakes up the dust, picking out colours and space in the backing, making sense of an enchanting patchwork puzzle.

Hayley Avron

PRE

Epic Fits (Skingraft)

This record is a hot sprint, 15 songs in 25 minutes, with several completing their laps around the minute mark, taunting flabbier onlookers. While vocalist Akiko Matsuura's other outfit, Comaneci, draws on kitsch metal for its riffola, our comrades-in-PRE use more inventive noise for fuel, borrowing from Liars' *Drum's Not Dead* and Death Sentence: Panda so shamelessly that at times, the references sound like samples.

Matsuura's vocals are percussive and exuberant, and it's she who dictates tone and pace. But this is not her vanity project; *Epic Fits* is an ensemble piece, one capable of making you miss each vicious riff as it tears past in pursuit, as shredded melodies and harmonic guitars call, respond and correspond, before cresting into boisterous unison, around and over and, oh. Gone.

Petra Davis



Alabama 3 MOR
(One Little Indian)
Still shaking their ass. Still mixing it up with the party tunes and fake

Americana. Still oodles of fun. Seems like all that separates Alabama 3's new album and The Go! Team is a handful of years, and the zeitgeist. Funky, for people who don't care where their funk comes from. (ET)



Arthur And Yu In Camera (Memphis Industries)
Seattle's Grant Olsen and Sonya Westcott have made a record

which positively glows and echoes with sunny Sixties West Coast optimism, a fuzzed-up Buffalo Springfield. Sadly, right now it's 2007 and every song here could end up soundtracking a mobile phone ad but it's good to believe every now and then. (EA)



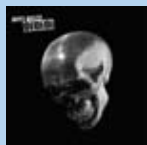
The Autumns Fake Noise From A Box Of Toys (Bella Union)
Ah, the bombastic rock voice. In the hands of

Freddie or even mere mortals like Shudder To Think's Craig Wedren it can be a thing of wonder, but one must never employ the Buckley/Muse approach. The Autumns seem keen on the latter, which is a shame. There are a few moments of small loveliness here, but for the most part it's overblown and pompous without being any fun. (TC)



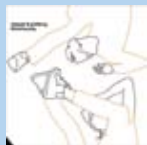
Battle Break The Banks (Transgressive)
Battle's debut album comes out spitting and snarling, guitars crazed

in distortion and vocals spitting poetry. There's defiance throughout and it's evident Battle value music over mere product. Often their stretched grasp thankfully reaches the target. Some will see *Break The Banks* as trad Eighties indie retro-ism, others will enjoy the grandeur. (JF)



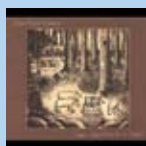
Boys Noize Oi Oi Oi (Boys Noize)
The cover art tells you everything you need to know: Damien Hirst's Aztec skull covered,

not in diamonds, but squares from a mirror ball. Serotonin-flooding, panic-inducing electro, with juddering, acidic synth lines from Daft Punk at demo stage. They sneer at the frippery of Justice and go straight for the robot punching you in the face effect. (JD)



Dapayk And Padberg Black Beauty (Mo's Ferry)
Being a Berlin duo that's one-half fashion

model, one-half underground techno producer certainly carries some cool points – but the deadpan vocals and arid, skeletal beats they have produced sound more dull than sassy, and rather short of funk, too. (RW)



Orion Rigel Domisse What I Want From You Is Sweet (Language Of Stone)
Song titles include 'Fake

Yer Death', 'A Faceless Death', 'Drink Yourself (To Death)'. Hmm, I think there could be a theme going on there. A nice creepy old forest of a record, as sung by the exhumed, maggotty corpse of an evil little girl who pulled wings off flies. (EA)



Encomiast Encomiast (Lens)
A collection of dark ambient drone pieces from 1999, now re-edited and released

for the first time. Encomiast's earliest recordings will take you on a journey down claustrophobic dark corridors which open out onto widescreen vistas of Arctic twilight. The isolation never felt so welcoming. (EA)



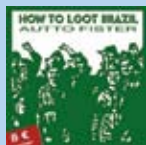
Extra Golden Hera Ma Nono (Thrill Jockey)
Extra Golden are a US-Kenya cross-cultural project that combines

sunny benga music with boogie-woogie influences, sounding at times like a beautiful, transcendent fusion of international rhythms, and at others like a lumpen jam from the credits of *Later with Jools Holland*. (RW)



Hands On Heads/ The Sticks Split (Upset The Rhythm)
Short split release that proves being brief

means never having to say you're sorry. Hands On Heads erase any erratum that dares suggest the no wave is crashing, by successfully rewiring your brain to receive as pop, shards of short, sharp, impenetrable, noise. I've thrown guitars down staircases in search of a more commercial sound than The Sticks. But who cares? Pleasingly ramshackle garage skronk for corpse-jerking dance moves. A triumphant 10-inch. (MC)



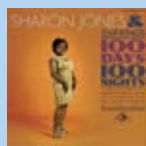
How To Loot Brazil?
Autto Fister (myspace.com/howtoloottobrazil)
Claiming to be

influenced by ABBA, Melvins and The Rakes (and, yes, they sound like they are) How To Loot Brazil isn't Bonde Do Role's latest album title but a German three piece who make DIY, lo-fi protest music that you could dance to. Like the nihilists from *The Big Lebowski* covering Bis. (JD)



Georgie James Places (Saddle Creek)
If you can get past the bizarre, throaty inflection of Laura

Burhenn's voice that plagues 'Cake Parade', you'll find *Places* to be a catchy affair. Think Brian Wilson, think Elliot Smith, think Fleetwood Mac, think tunes that you sing along to before you've even heard them. (HA)



Sharon Jones And The Dap Kings 100 Days, 100 Nights (Daptone)
The Dap-Kings have

backed Amy Winehouse, Ghostface Killah, Lily Allen. The Dap-Kings rock, sound like the soul band of yr dreams, circa 1968. Ms Jones has a good, not great voice: with someone like Rachel Nagy (Detroit Cobras) fronting, this could be special indeed. As it is, it's just fine. (ET)



Longstone Longstoned: Remixes (El Bandito)
Originals by Dafydd Morgan's Stylus, Echo And The Bunnymen's

Will Sergeant and others rendered all but unrecognisable in Logson's quixotic electronic processor. Echoes of Orbital, but in a mutating, lucid-dreaming style, vocals drifting from the mist, bleeps and glitched echoing back like radio emissions reflected off a distant satellite. (LP)



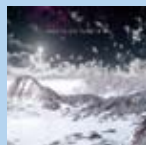
Magnum 38 Old Europe Strikes Back (Shitkatapult)
Blocky punk electronics from Berlin, and not so cerebral with it, as the

sleeve featuring the creator with a bullet wound in his head may suggest. Crunchy synthesiser, piston beats, glitch tools used to dismember rather than to fragment; *Old Europe Strikes Back* rocks like Godzilla in trainers. (LP)



Mass Shivers Ecstatic Eyes Go Glossy (Pickled Egg)
Mutant blues, motorik rhythmatics, early Eno whimsy and

Stooges grindhouse riffage all rub their oily hips together like a deep fried harmonic sex coven and immaculately conceive a troubled but beautiful bastard hot-chrome hybrid we might just christen 'Captain Beef Can' if we're feeling asinine. (JP)



Minus The Bear Planet Of Ice (Undergroove)
Inexplicably this reminds me of windsurfing: dynamic,

breezy, dated. The turn-off for anyone who digs meandering electronica-dipped guitar pop will undoubtedly be Jake Snider's snotty vocals. They're missing out on a unique tangle of noises, moods and ideas. (TG)



Monkey Swallows The Universe (The Casket Letters) (Loose)
Honeyed, gorgeous

female vocals wash over finger-picked acoustics as delicate folk tales are woven through ghost stories, disenchanted lovers and make believe. Second album *The Casket Letters* is littered with simple metaphors and haunting harmonies. With its mix of dark narratives, giddy pop and sincerity, the charm lies within its subtleties. (EG)



The Monks Kitchen The Wind May Howl (1965)
London needs more

folk-rock to soften its

fast, fashionably, edgy edges. A surprise addition to the label harbouring The View, but sounding close-to-nature like it were recorded in a barn full of percussive trinkets and guitar mufflers can lead to only one conclusion: *The Wind May Howl* is a good start. (TH)



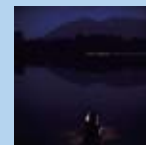
RF And Lili De La Mora Eleven Continents (Time Release)
I want to adore them, I really do. Their hearts

are in the right place, they wish for their songs to inspire us "to hope and dream", they get Joanna Newsom to guest on some typically wonderful harp. This record should really be the sound of a baby seahorse whispering 'I Bring You Love'. But it all just washes away on a cloud of wafy nothingness. (EA)



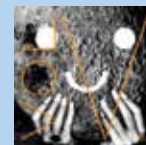
Stars In Our Bedroom After The War (City Slang)
It's a recovering, hopeful, personal,

post-argument album. It's the Postal Service do stargazing emotionalists' fourth album. It briefly revels in its own psycho-pomp before dribbling and drabbing to an underwhelming finale 20 minutes too late for a band claiming to be pop but insisting on writing epic anthems. It's missable. (TH)



Tiny Vipers Hands Across The Void (Sub Pop)
There's nothing poisonous about this monstrously

atmospheric and utterly demoralising acoustic marathon, presumably put on the earth by Seattle solo artist Jesy Fortino to suck you in, spit you out and leave you wanting more, but not knowing why. It's probably the 10-and-a-half minutes of destructive solitude on 'Swastika' that does it. (RW)



Various The Glimmers: Vol 5 (Eskimo)
Look beyond the tediously obvious

hits (Primal Scream, LCD Soundsystem) and there's plenty of inspired, obscure grooves nicely woven together here, from wig-out disco to Bollywood beats; but the Glimmers need suppress their 2manydjs ambitions and stick to the crate-digging tendencies that are their forte. (RW)

Brief notes: Euan Andrews, Hayley Avron, Merek Cooper, The Corpo, John Doran, Jonathan Falcone, Thom Gibbs, Emily Graham, Tom Howard, James Papademetrie, Louis Pattison, Everett True, Robin Wilks



Mathew Sawyer And The Ghosts Blue Birds Blood (Stolen)

Now, this is Truecore.

Absolute heartland: the voice is soulful, cracked, melancholy. The melodies are beautiful, full, but certainly not overplayed – a smattering of echoed backing harmonies here, a hand-splatter of percussion there. The album cover is Xerox-style on a plain cardboard sleeve, bagged. Second song in, the poignant to-the-max ‘Looking Right Back At Me’ sounds pure prime Subway Sect...and you just know I’m going to love that, Subway Sect being one of the three acts that make up the boundaries of Truecore. (TV Personalities and Patrik Fitzgerald are the other two, in case you were wondering.) ‘Don’t Want To Hang Around’, meanwhile, is smart and soulful and self-deprecating and laden down by literature and life, and filled with melodies so inflamed you just want to hug them and tell them not to worry, everything’s OK, you don’t ever need to be lonely again...

Wait. Where were we?

Oh yeah. So when Dan Treacy came out from hiding, or his prison ship, or wherever he was, Mathew was the person he got to fill the drum stool in the latest incarnation of TV Personalities...and, man, this album so recalls the glory days of the TVPs (um, that never actually existed, now I think on it: being plagued by self-doubt and joke numbers and crap production) it’s genius. But, um, that’s the great thing about having your own genre: you get to write your own rules and where in other genres such similarities could well matter, they most certainly don’t here. After all, there are so few of us around.

‘Heartbreaker’ boasts the best shouted-yet-tuneful female backing vocals this side of Wet Dog; ‘Love Will Come To Town’ plucks both on a mandolin and at your heart strings; ‘When Death Walks In’ puts me in mind of Nikki Sudden; ‘Don’t Ever Die Johnny’ resonates in its loneliness, and...

Yeah. I love this record.

Everett True

Prefuse 73

Preparations (Warp)

My guess is Guillermo Scott-Herren finds it really difficult when people ask, “What music do you like?” There’s such an onslaught of disparate influences in this, his fifth album under the Prefuse 73 moniker, that the brilliance of the production is easy to forget. ‘The Class Of 73 Bells’ is a comforting sonic rug, but there’s nothing to set it apart from any kind of ambient soundtrack you might get by say, wandering around a pond, while ‘Beaten Thursdays,’ for all its undoubted density is just kind of *there*, like a really expensive bit of furniture after the novelty wore off. Elegant, sanitised glitch, but there’s little you remember two songs later.

Thom Gibbs

Prints

Prints (Temporary Residence)

Tremendous, this. Distilling the very best parts of smooth Seventies California rock music by simply ditching the oily lyrics about old men leching after young girls and just importing the creamy guitar-led melodies and general cheery disposition, Prints have made the record I wish I had my hands on all summer. Imagine Steely Dan kicking out the creepy cronies and reforming with John Fahey and Brian Eno at the helm. ‘Pretty Tick’ in particular, is a wonder, sounding like the theme tune to the ultimate *Miami Vice* rip off TV that never got made. Two songs later, and the absolutely gorgeous ‘Blue Jay’ has convinced me that I need to move to Santa Barbara as soon as possible, steal a yacht and go on a joyride. This record might get me into trouble.

The Corpo

Siouxsie

Mantaray (Universal)

La Sioux’s first full solo album is a mixed brew in the best and worst sense of the word. On the downside, this seems to

be a sequel to, of all Banshees albums, *Superstition*, with an embrace of dance beats that balances between the sharp-eared and the hesitant. Having Goldfrapp collaborator Charlie Jones on board signals what’s up even more, but, in ways, that’s where this album shines – rather than openly revisiting the glam past that Siouxsie’s happily taken inspiration from, she sidesteps the shuffling beats for moody strings and a kind of seething passion that’s well-suited to longtime friend Marc Almond, very nicely at that. But calling a track ‘Loveless’ and not at least attempting to compact that entire album into a four-minute cover can only be a missed opportunity.

Ned Raggett

Strings Of Consciousness

Our Moon Is Full (Central Control)

This is the flagship release of Barry Adamson’s new label, and like his output as a composer for TV and film, it’s suitably twisted, dark and beautiful. Performed by a multi-continental nine-piece, this album is striking in its darkness. In ‘Cleanliness Is Close To Godliness’, Eugene Robinson of Oxbow rants, ponders and devastates over changing waves of night-time jazz, formless noise and electro-beats. But while there are guest narrators aplenty, it’s the music that makes this live. For there’s a vastness here, and everything flows so peacefully that it sinks deeper and deeper into the mind as you listen. It almost becomes a subconscious process, the ears are bypassed and the brain waltzed into a state of bliss – though woken, often, by the violence of stories unfolding, before the music ebbs over you again.

Jonathan Falcone

Subway Sect

1978 Now (Overground)

Um. OK. The first Subway Sect album has a chequered history. The ‘78 line-up of the literate, sardonic, punk band went into

a Gerrard St basement to record their debut with the producer behind the first Clash album. The Slits were simultaneously recording *Cut* with Dennis Bovell – they took the nights, and the Sect had the daytime.

This album never surfaced: someone decided Subway Sect weren’t good enough on their instruments – and the tapes were never delivered for mixing, later lost in a flood. Very rough versions of some of the songs have surfaced (notably on the excellent 1999 retrospective *20 Odd Years*) but the actual album that finally appeared (two years too late, in 1980) under the Subway Sect moniker, *What’s The Matter Boy*, was actually recorded by Vic with a different band (The Black Arabs, ‘stars’ of *The Great Rock N’ Roll Swindle*), after Rhodes sacked the original band and convinced Vic to become his in-house songwriter. This album – scratchy, hesitant, genius – is one of my pillars of the International Pop Underground (Subway Sect invented Orange Juice, and Orange Juice invented the rest). Legend has it that Vic played his guitar out-of-tune for the entire record, and the label owner went back in and re-recorded his parts. “He must have been a hippie,” Vic spat. “He knew how to play a guitar.”

So, it’s 2007. And Vic’s still bothered by the fact the original album never came out: so he’s got together with a bunch of mates and recorded it, kinda like Brian Wilson with *Smile*, only this one is way more listenable. Vic’s voice is still as warming, cracked and special as ever, the music is sometimes heavy-handed but still very passable and... yeah. There’s always room for one more on top. I would in no way recommend anyone wanting to discover what’s so special about Vic to start here, but hell. It’s still ace.

Everett True

TI

TI Vs TIP (Grand Hustle/Atlantic)

In which the artist formerly known as TIP – forced to change his name as fame beckoned ‘cos of some old guy that used to be in A Tribe Called Quest already used part of it, has a massive hit and thus has enough balls to CHANGE IT BACK! For one album only, in an extended ghetto opera sort of like *Trapped In The Closet* if they didn’t use the same backing track every time, we have face off. Seven tracks apiece from the thug TIP and the suited business hustler TI, followed by a four track showdown. As it pans out, TIP is a bit more energetic and fun; TI will perhaps be better at getting radio programmers to squeal. But the similarities are more striking – fearless and gruff, either incarnation will relentlessly ball and assert his rightful materialist supremacy. All entertaining, but it begs the question: is it still schizophrenia when both personalities are essentially the same?

Ringo P Stacey

Various

Add To Friends

(www.someonegood.org)

This is marvellous. Compiled directly from ‘friends’ that the Queensland, Australia label has made via MySpace – mostly textural, gently pastoral Japanese bands along the lines of Tenniscoats and Midori Hirano; or influenced by same (Steal Steal Ground’s sweetly trembling ‘Bad Waves Of Paranoia’; The Pancakes’ gorgeous ice cream van melody ‘Jane And Jenny’) – this is the music

I associate with Stephen Pastel and his excellent Geographic label (Maher Shalal Hash Baz, Melody Dog, *et al*). Charming, perhaps a fraction twee (but never irritatingly so), with tons of honey-coloured off-key brass and racky rhythms and voices to curl up snugly next to, and die for. It’s unfair to pick out a single track, cos pretty much every one of the 18 here are so sweet, but maybe My Little Airport’s breathless, fairground ride ‘Leo, Are You Still Jumping Out Of The Windows In Expensive Clothes’?

Everett True

Various

You Are Hear Sessions (Hearing Aid)

Post-Peel explorations of the outer edges of music can come on like hipster freemasonry, supplying plentiful recordings of one-legged Germans screaming till they pass out but offering seemingly no way in for those of an inquisitive nature. However, *You Are Hear*, a collection of radio sessions recorded live and broadcast over the last five years by Resonance FM DJs Magz Hall and Jim Backhouse, bucks this trend, with sounds as approachable as they are experimental. Germlin, No Bra, and Noxagt represent, and album highlight comes from The Man From Uranus, the soundtrack to the annual Delia Derbyshire-sponsored village tip-toeing race.

Ben Webster

White Hills

Glitter Glamour Atrocity (White Hills)

Info on these NY psychonauts is scant, but Julian Cope has been both fan and benefactor. Of course; this is space rock stoned immaculate, but (in common with the arch druid’s impassioned agit-pop moments) paradoxically grounded in the crises of here and now. ‘Love Serve Remember’ – a mightily Buttholian spasm of drooling lysergic malevolence – is a telling centrepiece, with GW Bush speeches doctored into a faltering monologue of psychotic inanity, while the primordial ‘Passage’ is accompanied by garbled ruminations on an impending apocalypse. There’s plenty of nods to Hawkwind *et al*, but this lysergic maelstrom has less to do with stoned Hobbit antics than end-times paranoia. All the usual ingredients are joyfully applied as analogue fizz and whoosh and FX-sodden freakout soloing lend a familiar but fabulous glow to this muscular slab of kosmische heaviosity.

James Papedmetrie

Wooden Shjips

Wooden Shjips (Holy Mountain)

It begins with a rolling Doors-y groove. Then comes a piercing Doors-y organ riff. Then comes a mumbled Morrisonesque Doors-y vocal. Hell, maybe it is The Doors? I hate The Doors. But then, something else happens. After a brief dalliance with a verse, the singing is replaced by a full-on freakout phasers-on-kill screamer of a guitar solo. Man, the longhairs will be shaking their heads to this one. Voice, organ and guitar screamer continue to alternate at random before the song fades out. The second song begins with the most rudimentary metal riff ever, something the first lesson of “Be A Heavy Rock Guitar Player” would skip. But it all WORKS. The songs get longer and slower and more stoned. Wooden Shjips are from San Francisco. Of course they are.

Euan Andrews

INDEPENDENT ESSENTIALS



THE DONNAS BITCHIN'

15 fist-pumping, shout out loud tracks from The Donnas, the album cranks out characteristic girl power lyrics set to high energy riffs and raw punchy beats. A non-stop rock party!



VARIOUS ARTISTS A BUGGED OUT MIX BY THE KLAXONS

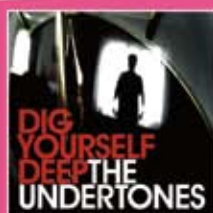
From the 2007 Nationwide Mercury Music Prize winners, two CDs mixed and selected by Klaxons featuring tracks by The Chemical Brothers, Justice and an exclusive Klaxons remix.

THE HOLLOWAYS
SO THIS IS GREAT BRITAIN?
The Holloways release this special 2 disc edition of their album 'So This Is Great Britain'. The bonus disc of B sides includes tracks never released before on CD. Includes the singles 'Generator' and 'Two Left Feet'.



BLOOM ALL THAT IS

Bloom burst onto Myspace with over 180,000 hits. The music ranges from delicate to sheer bouts of rage. Vocals compared to a merge of Bob Dylan and Eddie Vedder.



THE UNDERTONES DIG YOURSELF DEEP

Filled with riff heavy pop-punk gems packing 14 songs into 33 minutes. From the infectious hooks of the title track, to the raucous 'So Close' and the taut and feisty 'She's So Sweet', the album rolls back the years, whilst moving forward to the present.

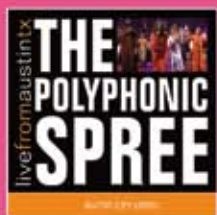
COWBOY JUNKIES TRINITY REVISITED (DVD-CD)

In Nov 2006 the Cowboy Junkies with special guests Ryan Adams, Natalie Merchant & Vic Chestnut convened in Toronto for a 20th anniversary one-off performance of the legendary Trinity session.



JOE BONAMASSA BLUE GIN

11 songs of sheer beauty and power. More blues and milder than 'You & Me'. Great songs, great vocals and of course smokin' guitars! "The fluid guitar recalls Bonamassa's childhood hero Stevie Ray Vaughn" Q



THE POLYPHONIC SPREE LIVE FROM AUSTIN, TX

This classic Polyphonic Spree set was recorded in August 2004. Available on CD and DVD, it includes Hold Me Now and It's The Sun.

PHOTEK FORM & FUNCTION VOL 2

The highly anticipated sequel to Photek's critically acclaimed Form & Function 1 is set to be another classic in any drum n bass fan's collection.



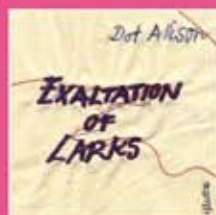
SUNBURNED HAND OF THE MAN FIRE ESCAPE

Sunburned Hand Of The Man produced by Four Tet, artwork by EYE of Boredoms and featuring members of Vibracathedral Orchestra. Available from 1st October.



WE START FIRES WE START FIRES

"Ace, obviously" NME
"Ones to watch" The Guardian
"Gratifyingly aggressive and winningly pop" The Times



DOT ALLISON EXALTATION OF LARKS

Exaltation Of Larks is a heart-rending, soul-searching album that is haunted by musical spirits of The Beach Boys, Nick Drake, Emmy-Lou, Alexander Skip Spence, Neil Young and Dusty Springfield.

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awfully deep

Words: **Joe Shooman**

Illustration: **John Cei Douglas**

Lost and found: young folk delving through ages past, girl visionaries seeking their voice, and glimpsing the future through synthesised sound

Various: Keb Darge And Cut Chemist Present *Lost And Found* (BBE)

Various: Kitty, Daisy And Lewis' *A To Z: The Roots Of Rock And Roll* (Sunday Best)

Vashti Bunyan: *Some Things Just Stick In Your Mind: Early Singles And Demos 1964-1967* (Fatcat)

Lisa Germano: *Lullaby For Liquid Pig* (Young God)

Various: *Well Deep: Ten Years Of Big Dada Recordings* (Big Dada)

Ladytron: *Witching Hour Special Edition* (So Sweet)

If, as is often claimed, people are now consuming their music track by track rather than album by album, the huge amount of compilations released begins to make sense. Not only that, but a new phenomenon has emerged. In the past, discovering an artist required investment into not only their original albums and releases, but also poring over interview after interview, tracing their influences, embarking on a detective-like trawl to gain a deeper appreciation of the musicians and kindred spirits who inspired and shaped them. Nowadays, it's made ever easier with the concept of the musician-compiled compilation CD. Take **Keb Darge** and **Cut Chemist**, DJs mostly famed for their funk/hip hop sets over the years. Presumably an attempt to display a musical knowledge outside the realms of your traditional crate diggers, their *Lost And Found* is a double CD of rockabilly and obscure-ish blues tracks from Jack Rabbit Slim to Charlie Feathers. It makes no sense, really, but the songs are still ace, and hark back to a time when albums were less a narrative than a collection of tracks. Similar is **Kitty, Daisy And Lewis'** own *A To Z: The Roots Of Rock And Roll*. Three teenage rockabilly kids, the spawn of Ingrid Weiss of The Raincoats, here they flick through records that their parents were too young to experience first time around, a dusty suitcase of boogie-woogie and R&B from names like Oscar

McLollie And The Honey Jumpers that make up for what they lack in definitive historical weight with fresh-ears enthusiasm. But what would be really interesting would be Keb Darge producing the rock'n'roll youngsters. We can only hope.

Some never-heard tracks make their debut on **Vashti Bunyan's** *Some Things Just Stick In Your Mind*, which is something of a treasure trove of previously unreleased demos and unreleased single

Like dreaming of being kissed by a chiffon-skirted Julie Christie in a field full of butterflies

tracks from the mid Sixties, including the much mythologised Jagger/Richards-penned 'I'd Like To Walk Around In Your Mind'. It verges on ridiculous hippy wetness, of course, but the voice is lovely and the sentiments are of love, often in the most disarming way, so who's arguing? The sound quality is a little troublesome, but that's perhaps forgivable, given that disc two is a gorgeous set of solo demos

that have literally been gathering dust in Bunyan's brother's attic; and the intimacy of the delivery feels like dreaming of being kissed by a chiffon-skirted Julie Christie in a field full of butterflies. Three decades later, and on the re-release of her 2003 piece of naïf gorgeous indie, *Lullaby For Liquid Pig*, **Lisa Germano's** take on the breathy songstress vibe shares a lot of Vashti's aesthetic but frames it in overtly dreamtime arrangements; as Young God's Michael Gira, who rescued this from obscurity, after the label that originally released it collapsed, writes: "You're drifting weightless through Lisa's gossamer world, where everything's infused with a woozy, fairy tale melancholy, and maybe just a hint of the sour taste of last night's wine". At the time, it felt timeless, and in 2007 it still does, with the added bonus of extra live tracks and home recordings that are almost most more compelling.

Back in the now, it's congratulations to Big Dada for making it through 10 years as a label, something they're celebrating with a double CD. To say that it is of a high standard is a crashing understatement: from the opening attack of Roots Manuva's 1999 'Movements' through to cLOUDDEAD's astonishing 'Physics Of A Bicycle' the pace, the rhymes and the ideas rarely fall below the magnificent.

Electronica aplenty, too, on **Ladytron's** Special Edition of *Witching Hour*, which boasts a bonus CD of remixes (Hot Chip, Simian Mobile Disco, etc) and B-sides. Given the 'Tron have a deep love of Eighties electro (and on this evidence, The Kinks, too), their music has an inbuilt datelessness. Except for 1982, possibly. Arguably, they were always more effective as a singles band, extremely capable of writing frosty and occasionally arch, but surprisingly accessible, radio hits with a sad darkness about them, and it is by the singles that they will be remembered, rather than the albums. Expect 'Destroy Everything You Touch', then, to appear on Cliff Richard's 100th Anniversary download compilation, *Trash And God: The Songs That Formed My Second Youth* when it's released in a few decades, directly to the iChip in our children's brains.



revolution song

Words: **John Doran**

Illustration: **Meg Hunt**

Various

The Very Best Of Ethiopiques (Manteka)

As Roland Barthes pointed out: "All domination begins by prohibiting language". And so it was in Ethiopia during the Eighties and Nineties under Mengistu's rotten Marxist dictatorship. The golden era of Ethiopian soul, funk and jazz of the Sixties and Seventies was driven underground and then almost destroyed altogether by a draconian system of lyric censorship and a rigorous curfew that robbed two entire generations of what we take for granted when it comes to consuming and enjoying music.

Of course, the reduction of tensions from and towards Eritrea and democracy mean that Addis Ababa now literally throbs with the very same musical culture that threw up its own James Brown (Alemayehu Eshete) and its own Miles Davis (Mulatu Astatke). The *Ethiopiques* series (now a wallet-terrifying 21 CDs long) have long been bringing the sublime and beguiling sound of East African tradition (the languid five-note pentatonic

The golden era of Ethiopian soul, funk and jazz was almost destroyed altogether

scale and its own peculiar ambling rhythms) with Western pop innovations.

This double compilation gives you a concise introduction to post-war Ethiopian music and shows how the development can be seen as similar to the progression of Jamaican pop in the Sixties and Seventies, which is ironic given their mutual involvement in the culture of Ras Tafari. Saxophonist Tesfa Maryam Kidane is probably the most Americanised musician featured here, given that he used to practise along to long range broadcasts of jazz and R&B from an American military base in Asmara. Reflecting his importance on the scene as a whole, there are several tracks by Mulatu Astatke who spent the Sixties studying music in the US and the UK. When he returned to Ethiopia he brought with him a passion for Latin and jazz that he incorporated into his own style, which easily shows him as being an influence on Fela Kuti, whose presence would be felt all across Africa. Astatke, the self-proclaimed (and probably the only contender to be) King of Ethio-jazz,

worked mainly in the field of instrumentals or arranging music for singers.

It is sad to note that, as with many here, we'll never know how great a musician he could have become, as he chose to become an 'on message' musician rather than to go underground or flee the country like others did, and his output drops off in quality seriously after the mid-Seventies. This said emigration wasn't some kind of panacea either: Vocalist Girma Bayene fled Mengistu to the US only to return in 1981. And, despite being one of the key innovators of the Ethiopique sound, he disappeared from view, unrecognised. It is not even clear if he is still alive or dead, lending his intonations an inescapable melancholy.

On a personal note, since a rather gauche attempt to impress my soon-to-be girlfriend three years ago ("What? This? Oh it's just this Ethiopian jazz thing I'm into"), a completely unplanned purchase of *Ethiopiques 11* (still my favourite) has provided an almost unquantifiable amount of pleasure.

Caravan

The Show Of Our Lives (Universal)

Caravan formed from the split nucleus of mid-Sixties Canterbury longhairs The Wilde Flowers, whose other members Kevin Ayers and Robert Wyatt birthed Soft Machine. But on the strength of this compilation of Peel sessions and Radio 1 concerts, it's hard not to conclude that their allotted share of prog-jazz primordial stew was mostly fol-de-rol and soggy noodle. With a surfeit of awful, leering puns — 'If I Could Do It All Over Again, I'd Do It All Over You', 'Virgin On The Ridiculous' — songs here lurch awkwardly from wide-eyed paisley pop to jazz-monster freak-outs with only sporadic moments of cosmic alignment and fearless acceleration

towards the electrical hook-up at the end of the galaxy. All too often, though, they're parked up in a land of faux-Barrett whimsy and "nasty grumbly grimbles", trying to find curtains to match their 7/4 time.

Abi Bliss

Johnny Cash

Original Sun Sound Of.../
All Aboard The Blue Train (Charly)
Greatest!/Now Here's... (Charly)

Jerry Lee Lewis

Jerry Lee Lewis/Jerry Lee's Greatest (Charly)

Reissues of Sun recordings are always welcome, whatever the year, whatever the format. This format seems particularly

generous, though: the first CD pairs the Man In Black's 14th album, the railway-themed *All Aboard*. ... from 1962, with his final Sun album, 1964's mixed bag of show-stoppers and standards ('Goodnight Irene', 'Big River') with its familiar tic-tac guitar sound faithfully chugging throughout, and even throws a bonus 12 tracks from 1959's *Johnny Cash Sings Hank Williams*. Now that's a whole lotta Cash for your buck!

The other one is no less engaging: *Greatest!* is actually his third Sun album, while 1961's *Now Here's*... contains the hard-edged gem 'Cry, Cry, Cry' and much Dixie gone Cash, and is worth purchasing for these alone. Plus, there are another four bonus tracks... you get the picture.

Personally, I can't get enough of Fifties and early Sixties Cash — and both these reissues sound flawless, pretty much, warts and overdubs and studio laughter and everything.

The Jerry Lee tracks, while fine in themselves, sound way more 'period piece': like he captured the zeitgeist of the times so effectively he remains forever tied to those times. Undoubtedly, the demented live shows were compelling — but they were based around a gimmick, and that gimmick doesn't transfer to acetate, least not now, half as well as his contemporaries Fats Domino or Little Richard.

Still: lovely digi-pak.

Everett True



hear the sirens coming

Words: **Jon Dale**

Illustration: **David Bailey**

Fire Engines Hungry Beat (Acute)

Your first lesson in the religion of the Fire Engines: don't hate them just because Franz Ferdinand are fans. I'm not the sharpest tack by any means, but when I first heard FF's 'Take Me Out', a light bulb clicked bright in my brain and I thought, 'Hang on a minute...' That needling guitar, that strange rigid funk, the nervy, vaguely harangued voice: this is Fire Engines territory.

So, the Fire Engines, four boys from Edinburgh who tail-ended post-punk with an aesthetic of pop-as-utility that matched instigative melody (the spiky pleasure of 'Candyskin') with brutalist yet sugar-spun funk (the entirety of the *Lubricate Your Living Room* mini-album) and a hint of the grandiose (the keyboards in 'Big Gold Dream'). Peers of Josef K and Orange Juice, they shackled up with Bob Last's Pop: Aural label after his rival Alan Horne tried to seduce them onto Postcard. *Hungry Beat* collects their four releases – three great singles ('Candyskin', 'Big Gold Dream', and

the self-released debut *Get Up And Use Me* and the aforementioned *Lubricate*. Their slender body of work is perfectly formed: sometimes I think every group should release just three singles and one mini-album, and then reorganise in order to go pop – in this instance, as Win – just after the going starts getting tough.

This isn't the first time this music has been compiled. In the early Nineties, Joe Foster's Rev-Ola imprint made this music available on *Fond*; no one cared at the time, and I remember, years later,

The key to useful funk is perpetual reduction

seeing duplicate copies propping up sales cards in half-price bins in my hometown of Adelaide. What price subcultural tides of change, then: *Hungry Beat* is perhaps a little too late for the various waves of post-punk redux, but that suits these four chancers from Edinburgh, who, by virtue of locale, loquacity and liberated energy, always felt out of sorts.

I say loquacious because this is articulate stuff, in every meaning of the word. It's deeply knowing, like all great music from its era, though unlike

Scritti Politti's deconstructions of pop, it doesn't wear knowledge on its sleeve. It's also, for the most part, clearly enunciated: Fire Engines had a sure grasp of what they were trying to communicate, exactly how to do it, and how to use their resources to best support their claims. The usual math goes Vic Godard + Captain Beefheart x no wave. That's fair enough, but I also hear the icy cool of James Brown's militant aesthetics, and the jagged edges of Sly Stone's 'In Time' and 'Thank You For Talkin' To Me Africa'.

Best of all, Fire Engines are perpetually in conversation with each other, in consort. Many groups pay lip service to playing as one, but few achieve this level of near-oxymoronic scrappy cohesion. What the Fire Engines do best is stay tight while inferring the perpetual risk of collapse. You hear it best on the pre-dubs of *Lubricate Your Living Room*: livewire energy played by punk-soul boys who have learnt that the key to useful funk is perpetual reduction. *Hungry Beat*, meanwhile, is a hotwired getaway vehicle that's fit to go, the end result of stress and pressure, its wayward urges kept in check by a near-punitive rhythm machine.

Now, about that Scars reissue...

Diana Dors

Swingin' Dors (Sanctuary)

She straddles the middle-ground between Doris Day and Peggy Lee – lascivious and flirtatious, of course; but also surprisingly refined and laidback, with a little trill on the top notes. Belying her busty, blowsy image, her vocal template is way more the easy swing of Frank Sinatra rather than the lusty largesse of the Fifties rock'n'roll chanteuses or Judy Garland (say). It's cabaret, sure: but cabaret like Julie 'Cry Me A River' London.

Wally Stott's arrangements are meticulous, near-miraculous in their fluid grace, the muted brass and syncopated rhythms: but the main surprise on this deluxe reissue of Dors' celebrated Sixties Pye album

is how much Dors can sing, and indeed with a swing.

'Roller Coaster Blues' is dirty, 'The Gentleman Is A Dope' is nasty-vindictive, and on 'Crazy He Calls Me' she even puts in a creditable stab at being Billie Holiday.

Everett True

Morton Feldman

For Bunita Marcus (Sub Rosa)

Feldman made many pieces for people. Once, he made one for John Cage. They talked a lot after they met in 1950 – rambling, lucid conversations held while walking on the Lower East Side, which lasted until early morning, and some of which made them onto tape. I love their conversations, the

ilts of Feldman's New York accent, the hums and harrumphs that punctuate Cage's sentences. Feldman also wrote a piece for pianist Bunita Marcus, reissued here

Feldman's music is internally physical, abstract in the sense that the subject matter is difficult to pinpoint. But while his pieces are also expressive, they're expressive in such a different way to what happens in our usual environment, ways hard to describe using forms from the everyday world. So listening entails really *listening*, with no intrusions and moments of silence.

Feldman once said that his role was the, "Old-fashioned role of the artist, deep in thought. Many times if I'm deep in thought though, it's just to get rid of the ideas... to

get to that physical stammer, to just go on with an empty head." The empty head without ideas is what is valued here, with Cage making the analogy that, "You might call it an ocean, with fish in it – with the fish being thoughts – the view is so full of the ocean that you don't notice the fish." To which Feldman responds, "But maybe I don't want the ripples". And perhaps that is what *For Bunita Marcus* sounds like: an ocean without ripples, or fish.

Miranda Iossifidis

Nub

Nub (And Then)

Retrospective from Nineties misfits features jarring tempo changes and uncertain vox. To

say they were heavily influenced by that Polvo/Chapel Hill thing would be an understatement. Nub serve as a reminder of why bands that followed couldn't quite pull off their ambitious ideas (hello, Pretty Girls Make Graves). You've got to be really clever to undulate between searing riffs, glimpses of rhythm section sparkle, and a yearning chorus, without losing momentum.

Nub do it flawlessly here in 'Velma'. Vocals are the recurring deal breaker. On 'Harrier' they're like a Morrissey pastiche by someone that's only ever read about Morrissey. It's forgivable because of beautifully dated production – what 'loud' was like before Pro Tools.

Thom Gibbs

Ooberman
The Lost Tapes: Rare Recordings 1991 – 2007 (Rotodisc)

I thought Ooberman were that Nineties band that sounded like Incubus. Remember them? My irrational bile was all but prepped to spill onto the page. But they don't appear to sound anything like Incubus, preferring instead a New Order meets Monaco meets Pet Shop Boys vibe, with proper Eighties sounding synths aside computer-generated 'boings!' employed only by the most confident of throwbacks, and vocals camp enough to make Neil Tennant look butch. But this is a rarities collection, so from their early bondage pop they kinda morph through a 'more-drums-please' period into something more sophisticated, culminating in the 2007 recorded and impossibly tender 'You're Too Beautiful' – a female-sung corker of a Björk-y ballad.

Fuck knows who the band was that I was thinking of before. (*I think you were thinking of Hoobastank – Ed*)

Tom Howard

Photek
Form And Function 2 (Sanctuary)

Rupert Parkes' early 12-inches as Photek saw drum'n'bass infused with UFO mysticism and a strain of Samurai fetishism that seemed to owe as much to the tribal percussion and Zen concentration of 23 Skidoo as pulp kung-fu flicks. His first career collection, *Form And Function*, was about as good as quote-unquote 'intelligent' drum'n'bass got; but this sequel, collecting dubplates and remixes, is rather more emblematic of the genre's confusion and stagnation in later years.

The opening 'Industry Of Noise' is d'n'b at its PS2-soundtrackin' worst, lumpen 'adrenaline' beats welded to some horrible rock guitar; 'Love And War' is clunky diva vocals and weak *X-Files* melodies. But there's some keepers here too, namely the TeeBee remix of 'Ni Ten Ichi Ryu', and 'Saturated Hip Hop', which strikes a neat balance between production intelligence and dancefloor velocity.

Louis Pattison

The Stranglers
The Story So Far (EMI)

Iron Maiden © Huntingdon Life Sciences.

Dave Queen

Trentemøller
The Trentemøller Chronicles (Audiomatique)

After his debut album, Trentemøller is now releasing a two-CD retrospective. Why? After all, there's very little that's new here, and it's

not as though any of it is particularly hard to track down. Still, there's no denying the quality of this music; and the first disc is very nicely mixed together to create a seamless sweep, from the slow wintry grace of the material from the underrated album *The Last Resort* (like the twilight ambient textures of 'Snowflake', presented in a bubbling live version) to the austere, pounding techno of his earlier 12-inches (like the sharp, snarling 'Killer Kat', and his own peak-time remix of 'Always Something Better').

The second disc, meanwhile, reminds us of that other Trentemøller – the one who set off 'flashlights and explosions' in clubs everywhere with spectacular remixes of Röyksopp, The Knife, Robyn et al.

Robin Wilks

Various
Eccentric Soul: The Big Mack Label (Numero Group)

Scratch underneath the surface: there's a ton of gems waiting to be rediscovered. In the same way that the *Nuggets* and *Pebbles* compilation of garage rockers gave the lie to the idea that the only thing goin' on in white-boy Sixties was in the charts, so there was a slew of local soul labels in every large urban community in America.

One such was Big Mack in Detroit, started on a \$1000 loan from Ed McCoy's father, no distribution and no promotion, moving into an office at 7018 West Warren: it later offered aspiring artists the chance – for \$14.95 – to walk in off the street and cut their own acetate 45. Not a bad way to discover budding soul acts on the cheap, you may think; and so it proved. Big Mack never hit the big time, though, and finally called it a day during the Eighties with a bunch of substandard gospel records – but man, when they were going, they really had something!

Rough, slightly overloaded production and spit-shine brass arrangements couldn't hide, nor hurt, the emotion in the voices of class doo wop act The Manhattans, and it's a wonder that Ms Tyree 'Sugar' Jones, and Essence, didn't get locked up for soliciting, so salacious are their voices (particularly on the latter's steamy rendition of 'Fever'). Performers' 'Mini Skirt' is a solid gold groove, and the church-influenced harmonies of The Grand Prix's totally send me.

This is a most welcome reissue.

Everett True

Various
Madlib: Beat Konducta Vol 3-4 – In India (Stones Throw)

You've heard a million bad hypotheses on why 'World Music' is a horrible, reductive term for a genre, which only serves to perpetuate the idea of foreign = other, helps to keep The Man on top etc, etc. Trouble is there's something undeniably refreshing about genre excursions outside of your comfort zone, however they're labelled, which is why this latest Madlib Beat Konducta project is such a winner.

Where you'd expect a big kick drum on 'Indian Hump' you get an odd Eastern rhythmic 'thrum!' noise, like a hippo humming. Any moment you're braced for Doom or Dilla to pay a visit, instead there's Bollywood movie excerpts and ragas, expertly placed and creating a constantly evolving mood.

Hip hop isn't the half of it. It's a jungle, an adventure, a guided tour of alien musical landscapes.

Thom Gibbs

Various
There Is Only One "T" In Wichita (Wichita)

Wichita, impressively, appear to have it all: The big band (Bloc Party), the credible NME band (The Cribs), alt royalty (Les Savy Fav), the sparkling newcomers (Los Campesinos!), Those Dancing Days), the hardcore duo (The Bronx, The Blood Brothers), the cult folk Welshman (Euros Childs), the ravin' hard dance act (Simian Mobile Disco), the New Weird Americans (Espers), the Swedish twee (Peter, Bjorn And John) and Pitchfork endorsed Americana (Clap Your Hands Say Yeah).

Not much wrong with that in a 'bit-of-everything' vein, nor with the alleged seven exclusives in 14 tracks, or their seeming reluctance to be pinned down to any particular style. Not much metal like, but you can't have everything, that'd be greedy, and greed is a sin. Some worthy self-love.

Tom Howard

Various
Wild Style: 25th Anniversary Edition Soundtrack (Mr Bongo)

In a sense, *everything* later is here in this 1982 soundtrack. The social consciousness of 'White Lines' foreshadowed in 'South Bronx Subway Rap' where Grandmaster Caz rhymes "Look past the garbage, over the trains, under the ruins, through the remains, around the crime and pollution, and tell me, where I fit in". Biz Markie, ODB, and even some semi-chilled Eazy E funkisms in Busy Bee's live routine over Fab 5 Freddy's 'Down By Law'. The NYC cool Nas jacked his intro to *Illmatic* from the 'Subway Theme'. The braggodicious fronting of P Diddy in his prime as one of the Fabulous Freaks claims to "Eat the finest foods, drink exclusive wines" on the six-minute cut from their set at The Dixie. And the relentless energy of *Enter The 36 Chambers* shot through the whole damn thing. Minus the crack, probably.

In another sense there's nothing else like it. Still party music.

Ringo P Stacey

Marc Wilkinson
Blood On Satan's Claw OST (Trunk)

Genuinely eerie and altogether wilder and raunchier than most of its contemporaries, Piers Haggard's *Blood On Satan's Claw*,

released in 1971, hunches menacingly between *Witchfinder General* and *The Wicker Man* in the annals of English witchy cinema. Seeing as Trunk Records made their name with the release of the soundtrack to the latter, at least partly responsible for all manner of recent spook-folkery, it's only fitting that they should bring the sounds of... *Satan's Claw* to the world. But don't go expecting the return of *Wicker! The Musical*, for *Satan* is a very different animal. Marc Wilkinson, then Director of Music for the National Theatre, provided the film with a fairly traditional orchestral score, albeit one that perfectly counterpoints its Olde English rural idyll with the encroaching horrors of the theremin-esque Ondes Martenot and the tritone, known to all Black Sabbath fans as the Devil's own interval.

It's a lovely, lively listen and one that's sure to imbue even the sweetest moments with looming menace.

Mark Pilkington

Susumu Yokota
Skintone Collection (Lo Recordings)

On the 10th anniversary of Leaf Records I asked label founder Tony Morley what records he was most proud of releasing. Very high up the list came the early albums by Japanese ambient/electronica pioneer and DJ Susumu Yokota – *Image 1983-1998* and *Sakura*. Fittingly, Ben Eshmade from Classic FM's Chiller Cabinet (the commercial classical station's ambient/experimental show) has chosen two tracks from *Sakura* to bookend this new compilation of Yokota's finest moments from the last decade or so.

'Kodomotachi' and 'Hagoromo' provide perfect examples of Yokota's craft. The plaintive vocals – sampled from Joni Mitchell's 'Songs To Aging Children Come' – and defiantly simple drum patterns of the former and the mournful strings and subtle phasing techniques of the latter sum up the beauty of much of Yokota's output.

In between there is much to admire, from the at times tribal 'Card Nation' to the lunar dreamscape of 'Saku' and from the Debussy-sampling 'Purple Rose Minuet' to the brooding bass explorations of 'Iconic Air'. Sadly, though, there's none of Yokota's earliest material – nothing from the albums *Acid Mt Fuji* (1994), *Plantation* (1995) and *Metronome Melody* (1996) to name just a few – to give a full picture of Yokota's art. Nonetheless, this is still strong stuff.

Stuart Aitken

under my stylus: pinback

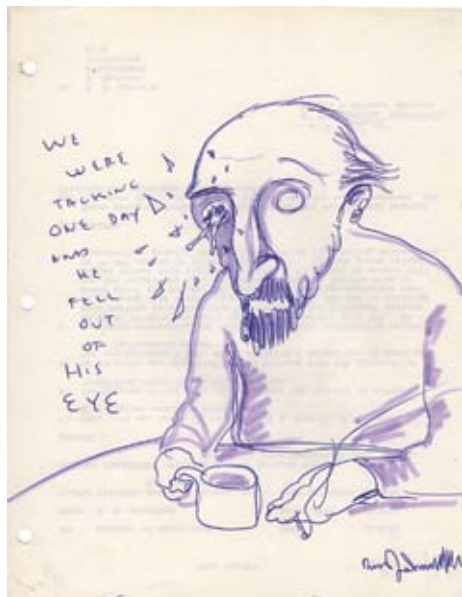


Family Fodder
Schizophrenia Party (Fresh)
"I've been pretty much way to busy to listen to other people's music for a while now, but boy was I stoked when my eBay-acquired

acetate of Family Fodder's *Schizophrenia Party* showed up today. I've been slowly accumulating their discography on vinyl over the last year or so. Sometimes it's hit ('Savoir Faire' – maybe the greatest single) or miss ('Coral', which is still fine). This is another hot one. A couple of the songs were already on the *Savoir Faire: The Best Of Family Fodder CD* that came out on Dark Beloved Cloud years ago, but I think the other songs on here are among their best. If you're a fan of the This Heat, Homosexuals or the Canterbury scene than you'll like this."

(Rob Crow)





drawing from life

Words: **Emily Bick and Frances Morgan**
Photography: **Steve Gullick**

As his drawings, paintings and sleeve art get their first UK retrospective at Newcastle's alt. gallery, **Plan B** has a chance encounter with a very sociable **Daniel Johnston**

Daniel Johnston's having a good run at the moment. He's just come off a sold-out European tour, and his art is touring the world.

I'm lucky enough to chat with him at a not-so-secret gig at the Windmill, in south London. What strikes me most about him is how lucid and self-aware he is. The last time he was in the UK, around the time the documentary *The Devil And Daniel Johnston* was released in late 2005, his health wasn't that great. He played truncated sets and seemed spaced out. He's medicated now, and the drugs seem to work. He's affable, chatty, generous. The only indication that anything is wrong is in his trembling hands.

I ask about his gig at ULU, the night before. "Well, I got a standing ovation, and the review in the paper gave me five stars! That's the most I've ever received, and the first standing ovation. I love it, it's great! As we play bigger venues, we can make more videos and stuff – we went to a studio today and saw one today that was really cool. It had all my characters in a clay animation thing, and it was really magical. It was really great."

And what about his other art? His drawings that contain a mixture of personal characters – ducks, eyeballs, boxers – and comic-book heroes.

"I do lots of drawings all the time, sell them on the internet," he says. "I like Casper, Captain America. Betty and Veronica. They're good clean fun, with no cursing."

He is also selling drawings at the gig tonight, for 30 quid each. Later, a tall skinny guy runs into the back room with a sheet of A4 and a pen. Daniel draws one of his Jeremiah bullfrogs and signs it, at no charge.

I ask how he got together with the singer-songwriters on the bill who play the support slots tonight. Both Jeremy Warmesley and Sparky Deathcap seem to owe something to Johnston's direct access to his emotions, his awkward self-confidence. Did he pick them? Does he see himself as passing the torch?

"Oh yeah, everybody is doing the same thing,

'Everybody is doing the same thing, and they're all copying me. I'm just kidding'

and they're all copying me." He grins. "I'm just kidding." Then he asks me to come back after the show for some cigarettes and soda pop. He's been chaining the whole time – what does he think of the smoking ban?

"I love to smoke, and when they won't let you smoke, it's a bummer, you know. You have to go outside, it's dark, it's dangerous, all these people

want your autograph, they want their picture taken – I'm like, please! You need some privacy, and I'm screaming, and I can just freak out, you know? But I know that I'm sane, 'cause I've got the papers to prove it."

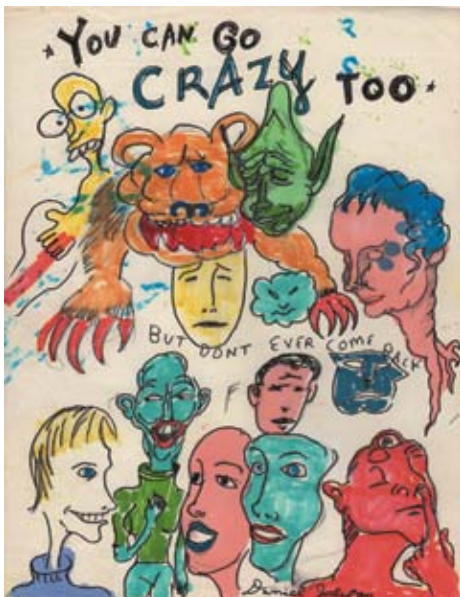
Which brings us to the film, *The Devil And Daniel Johnston*. It's a gentle portrait of Johnston's life and career that doesn't shy from his scarier episodes. What did he think of it?

"When the movie first came out, I didn't know what to think. It was pretty dark, to call it that, but it's pretty funny. It's got a sense of humour to it, it's hilarious. And I guess I'm just as dumb as I look in the movie."

It's hard to tell with him how much of what he says is deliberate, and how much is calculated; how much he knows that, fairly or not, he's known as an artist who suffers, and a lot of people love him for this. He has a reputation for fragility because of his much-publicised mental breakdowns. But the 'outsider art' tag is just wrong. Johnston has his demons, but he's not fighting them in a vacuum. He's been performing for more than 20 years and I get the feeling that he understands how to play up to his reputation.

In the film, there's a shot of one of Johnston's cartoons from when he was in his twenties, taking handmade tapes to the offices of journalists and DJs. A thought bubble hangs over Johnston's head, saying, "More Innocence". There's also a scene where Johnston palms his meds so that he'll sound more impassioned onstage. And there's a strange moment when he propositions me.

I want to ask how he was able to write songs that were so emotionally honest and raw and I get



nervous and ended up gushing that I think his songs are beautiful.

"No, you're beautiful! I'll give you \$130. More if you want."

"You don't have \$130, Daniel," says his brother, Dick. "I'm a half a millionaire now," says Daniel, "I knew when they told me and we all got to go out for Chinese food."

Later, after a confident performance, Daniel Johnston holds court backstage. He talks through his love for Laurie, the girl he met in art school who married an undertaker. He talks about his Christian upbringing and Bruce Springsteen and Mountain Dew. He runs through all the quirky setpieces that make up the Daniel Johnston legend, before there's another "did he really say that?" moment. Another journalist asks him if he still goes to church. Daniel begins dissembling before Dick cut in with, "You went to church last Sunday".

"Yeah, I go to church, there are a lot of pretty girls there. Last time I went to church, I saw a girl who looked good and I said, 'Hi, how're you doing?' and she said, 'Hello'." Pause. "She was 12."

Stupid questions get ridiculous answers, fair enough. Finally, I ask the dumbest question of all: "Do you think there's a difference between the kind of personal love you write about in your songs and the kind of love you get from being famous?"

"I only wanna be loved," he says. "Any band that tries for fame and fortune, they're gonna feel the same way. But it's a heartbreaking business, and I do love the people, and that's about all I can say." I hope he finds it – love, fame, whatever.

I hope he's OK.

(EB)

follow the signs

The first UK retrospective exhibition of work by Daniel Johnston is running until 10 November at Newcastle's alt. gallery. Presenting over 40 of his drawings alongside early tape covers and rare seven-inch record sleeves, it's a long overdue in-depth look at Johnston's visual universe. I asked curator Rebecca Shatwell what inspired her to put together *Daniel Johnston: It's A Beautiful Life*.

"I really wanted people to be able to see a whole body of work created by the artist over a 25-year period. I was aware that, despite the growing interest in his artwork, no one had curated a retrospective show – showing work across a range of different styles from 1981 to 2006. I was really interested in seeing what would happen if a substantial body of his work was shown in one place, so that you can see the recurring characters move through their different evolutionary states. The exhibition shows biro drawings, felt-tip pen drawings and works in colour and black and white. It was also really exciting to be showing two of his early cassette covers, for *Songs Of Pain* and *More Songs Of Pain*, which have never been shown in public before.

"I was keen to focus on the mythological universe his work creates, as not many of his exhibitions have done this. So the exhibition explains the evolution of all the main symbols – such as Jeremiah the Frog, The Duck and Vile Corrupt. Instead of focusing on his mental health history, I wanted to focus on the work rather than just the personality.

"Also I wanted to see the original works. I've seen them reproduced on websites, in print form and as artwork for the records. But nothing replaces seeing the originals, especially the felt-tip pen drawings with their vivid colours and the wonderful biro drawings from the early Eighties with their more delicate lines. I'm a fan of the music, and it's important that the gallery is located within alt. vinyl record shop. The ethos of the shop as a promoter of independent music links strongly with the independent spirit of mind of Daniel Johnston."

How did you first come across Daniel Johnston's work, and what was your impression of it?

"The first time I came across his music was at a live gig at the ICA in 2003 and I guess my

first impression was just the incredible raw energy of the live performance. I remember him performing 'Casper' and playing a small keyboard and was amazed at the quality of the songwriting and the power of the performance, and the brilliantly dark sense of humour. My first impression of the artwork was probably quite fearful, as some of the work is so powerful and the battles between good and evil they represent are so strong. Then I started looking more closely, working out the mythological universe and making links between the visual art and the music – and started to understand the humour and the complexity."

Is there any piece of his that you particularly love, and if so, why?

"My favourite work in the show is 'We Were Talking One Day and He Fell Out of His Eye'. It's a biro drawing from 1982 and shows a man just drinking coffee and smoking, but he has a small man falling out of his eye with shards of glass exploding out of the eye. It's a really simple line drawing and has all of Daniel's characteristic deadpan humour and absurdity. It is a brilliant and clever representation of the alter ego. Also the eye itself is really important in so much of Daniel's visual art and music – since it connects the body to the soul. Its slightly unclear but I think the figure falling out of the eye is the Polka-Dot Underwear Guy, which is one of Daniel's earliest alter egos, begun in high school. He often appears as a no name, faceless character struggling with life and its variety of threatening and evil characters."

What's your favourite song by Daniel Johnston?

"Difficult one – it changes all the time. I'll never forget the version of 'Casper' at the ICA in 2003. But at the moment I'm really into 'Fly Eye' and 'Sad Sac + Tarzan'. The track that always makes me laugh is 'Never Relaxed'."

alt. gallery is a new space in Newcastle Upon Tyne presenting international work at the intersection of visual art, music and sound. Based within alt. vinyl record shop, it opened earlier this year with Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, featuring contributions by Jad Fair and Yamataka Eye, among others. 61/62 Thornton Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 4AW www.altgallery.org (FM)



film & dvd



behind closed doors

Words: **Louis Pattison** and **Everett True**Illustration: **Hanna Wieslander**

Joy Division were a band apart, delving into the dark heart of the mundane. In the wake of Anton Corbijn's *Control*, **Louis Pattison** addresses some of the fables, while **Everett True** appraises their just-reissued catalogue

There's a persistent assertion you hear from the mouths of professional Mancunians that says Joy Division were nothing like their gloomy reputation, Ordinary Manchester lads. A "good laugh". But to swallow that at face value is to ignore the fact that the band we call Joy Division was knowingly, artfully constructed, by them and those around them – a collusion of personalities performing with a collective aesthetic. *Control*'s director, Anton Corbijn was one of several personalities that shaped this myth, helped make four Catholic grammar school kids into poster boys for post-punk nihilism.

There were others, too. Martin Hannett, whose production gave Joy Division's studio albums that sense of a glance beneath the shroud. The late Tony Wilson, whose ambition – artistic ambition, not afraid to dance with pretension – helped lend Joy Division an elevated air, apart from the schlocky safety-pin brigade. Designer Peter Saville, whose image of a pulsar that graced the cover of *Unknown Pleasures* lent the band a cosmic inhumanity. But it was Corbijn who crystallised the band's visual. It was he who took that shot of Joy Division poised at the top of a London Underground escalator, gazing down like men on the brink of the abyss. He made this aesthetic. And now, on *Control*, he revisits it.

But back to the opening premise: *Control* is not a Joy Division film, nor, accurately, is it strictly an Ian Curtis biopic. Based on a screenplay adapted from *Touching From A Distance*, the memoirs of Ian Curtis' widow Deborah, it's a tale of collapsing personal relationships and human weakness that three decades on, sees the Joy Division myth inverted; not myths, just men. It begins with Curtis (Sam Riley) – a preening poet and Bowie acolyte,

prone to stripping off and flexing Iggy-like in his bedroom mirror – meeting Debbie (Samantha Morton) when she visits his house with her then-boyfriend to listen to records. Before long, they're boyfriend and girlfriend, and then teenage man and wife. But as Debbie settles into a comfortable home life, Ian's rock star fantasies are rekindled, first by a Sex Pistols show at Manchester Lesser Trade Hall,

The house becomes a pressure cooker of resentment, baby's cot like prison bars

and then, with the help of Bernard Sumner (James Pearson), Peter Hook (Joe Anderson) and Stephen Morris (Harry Treadaway), realised.

Corbijn, it's pleasing to report, chooses to use the Joy Division segments as a valve for humour. Sumner is a boyish adolescent, obsessed with World War Two history. Peter Hook, with rock barnet and leather kecks, breaks fragrant wind in the dressing room. Steven Morris is the drummer, concerned little with the world outside his circle of toms. And there's a great performance by Toby Kebbell, who plays manager Rob Gretton with a loveable cuntishness. Frustratingly, it's where *Control* attempts to balance Ian and Deborah's internal pressures with the story of Joy Division that the narrative stumbles. With little time dedicated to the latter and so much to fit in, esoteric detail is tossed

off as trite dialogue; a scene where the band explain the origin of the Joy Division name to a studio owner – you'll recall it's a brothel in a Nazi concentration camp – feels gratuitous and clunky, shoehorned in for no particular reason.

The heart of the piece is in the scenes shared between Riley and Morton. Just as Corbijn's mordant, monochrome photography loaded four young men with the weight of the ages, here it applies a different, internal strain. Ian becomes withdrawn and distant, torn between the duty he feels for his wife and his affair with glamorous Belgian journalist Annike Honore; and the strain seems to intensify his epilepsy, fits becoming more frequent. The house becomes a pressure cooker of resentment, baby's cot like prison bars, phones sinister in their silence, piles of books and records a hiding place for lost signs of infidelity.

Control acknowledges that the real horror of late period Joy Division was not the decaying cityscapes of 'Interzone' or the jackboot click of 'They Walked In Line', but a more tangible emotional dysfunction that would not thaw – or, as 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' had it: "*Why is the bedroom so cold?/Turned away on your side*". The Ian Curtis we see in the film's final minutes is irretrievably damaged. He has wrecked his own relationship, neglected his child, imperiled his band, cannot trust his body. *Control* suggests Curtis was not seeking pity; merely the justification of his own inabilities, a voice to say "you can't". We all know what happens at the end, but it's telling that Curtis' final act is performed using the clothes rail, strung up like wet linen. Not a rock myth cracked like obsidian. Just a very domestic tragedy, hung out to dry. (LP)

Joy Division

Unknown Pleasures/Live At Factory Manchester (Warners)

Closer/Live At ULU (Warners)

Still/Live At High Wycombe (Warners)

You can't create great rock music while being ironic.

Joy Division were dredged up from the ashes of Warsaw — a heady 1977 Manchester band who liked to flirt with the imagery of Fascist stylists in order to upset others and create a coherent identity of their own. Warsaw were among England's earliest punk bands: listening to their recordings now, one is both struck by the frailty of the singing and the relentless jackhammer of the beats. A gothic intensity was matched only by the sense of mystery surrounding these four pale, insular boys. Quite why they decided to change their name to Joy Division and hone their sound towards darker climes doesn't concern us here.

What concerns us is the music and the effect it had on a generation of post-punk British music lovers, almost beaten down into submission by a decade of three-day weeks, strikes, civil unrest and depression. All we had in 1978 was the dole and sure, we enjoyed that (it gave birth to a generation of slackers), but it wasn't much, when you think on it. The mood surrounding Britain in the final days of the Seventies before Thatcher revolutionised the way we looked at ourselves (while correspondingly making our situation worse) was bleak. We needed some genius bands to drag beauty from our situation while not making light of it. We needed Joy Division.

Joy Division complemented the times, with their gothic imagery and staccato rhythms and sound of alienation. Words hinted at terrible thoughts; the music hinted at even more terrible thoughts. Back then, popular music had rarely experienced anything so (classically) gothic. Siouxsie And The Banshees were always far more playground, and also sexual — an emotion that Joy Division seemed to deliberately turn their backs on; literally, if you listened to their lyrics. The abiding image of Joy Division is of a grainy black and white photo, dressed in long overcoats, their backs to the camera on some rundown bridge in Manchester.

Joy Division were terrifying, precisely because of the silences between Stephen Morris' sullen drum sound and Peter Hook's cavernous, wall-choking bass, for the space in between Curtis' deeply affecting, monstrous words.

When Joy Division played live, it wasn't an exorcism like with Nick Cave's Birthday Party, or a celebration of community as with The Clash. Like with Daniel Johnston, you felt almost embarrassed to be caught watching Joy Division — and, in particular, Ian Curtis — the feeling of voyeurism was so overwhelming. The darkness both thrilled and chilled you. There was something undeniably grotesque and calming about watching the freak show that Curtis would turn himself into, dancing with jerky arm movements and leg steps that mocked his own epileptic fits. You couldn't drag yourself away from the sepulchral sound. It was all-encompassing. The funeral procession would drag inexorably on and on... and yes, Joy Division always were a funeral procession, long before we knew we had a death in the family to celebrate.

You can hear echoes of Joy Division's silences in many other groups, but most obviously on two seminal albums: 1980's *Colossal Youth* the solo album from shy, almost diffident, minimal Welsh group Young Marble Giants; and Boston band Galaxie 500's debut 1988 album, *Today*. Like Joy Division, there was an eerie darkness surrounding Young Marble Giants — not just on the album sleeves, but in their music too. It's strange how something so frail, so fragile and solemn, so commonplace, can give off such an aura of bleakness. In the locked grooves and desperate, ultra-thin guitar of Joy Division's debut album *Unknown Pleasures* (August 1979), you can almost taste the claustrophobic stench of Manchester's rain-swept streets and intimidating clubs. Meanwhile, Naomi Yang's Kramer-produced stately, sonorous bass sound on *Today* is an almost exact replica of Hook's instrument on *Closer*, Joy Division's second and final studio album, released in October 1980, four months after Curtis' death. The two records share a similar statuesque, intense beauty, a dank pressure. Both of Joy Division's studio albums are incredible — not least for supplying the rhythmic blueprint that New Order later built their career upon — and these reissues come replete with live recordings that add little, but do serve to bulk out the thinness.

Still was released in October '81, long after the event, it seemed then: rare and unreleased material stitched onto Joy Division's final live performance, as self-flagellating and distressing as you could hope for. Even now, I find this music next to near impossible to listen to — it holds too many memories, both depressed and depressing. (I was too obsessed with Curtis at the start of the Eighties; believed myself to be possessed of his spirit as I hurled empty whisky bottles and contemplated suicide from the ledges of fourth floor windows.) The only time I've played Joy Division at home for over two decades was the night I heard of my father's imminent death. But — man. Rock music doesn't come any more charged than this. (ET)





night fever

Words: **Stewart Gardiner**

Director Alex Holdridge discusses his cult Edinburgh festival hit **In Search Of A Midnight Kiss**

Look out for the ones that sneak up on you, catch you unawares. You're in the moment, but sometimes you don't notice that extra feeling for the movie – you're too busy falling in love with the characters on screen. It took a good couple of days after watching *In Search Of A Midnight Kiss* for me to realise that this was something really special. Without my realising it, *Midnight Kiss* became the first film I mentioned when asked what had been the best of the Edinburgh Film Festival so far. And I didn't find myself alone, as most people I spoke to were equally enthusiastic.

Set over one New Year's Eve, the down-on-his-luck Wilson (played with touching vulnerability by Scoot McNairy) goes from being caught jerking off over a photoshopped picture of his best friend's lady, to going on a blind date set up online. Hardly an auspicious start for his day, but it is in meeting the beautiful but troubled Vivian (a brilliantly nuanced performance from Sara Simmonds) that he is able to engage once more with the world. It is US indie shaped from motion picture classicism and is all the more refreshing for it.

I met with writer/director Alex Holdridge, an engaging guy. *Midnight Kiss* is his third feature, but the first to be picked up for distribution.

The film has a strong sense of narrative, which seems at odds with a lot of current US indie filmmaking.

"That's exactly right. That's why it frustrates me when people lump it in with mumblecore. 'Cause I like those movies, however that's not what I was intending. You're pushing it in a dramatic way that doesn't really fit within that mould."

I'm surprised that people would link you to that. Andrew Bujalski's films are closer to someone like Eric Rohmer – whereas your movie made think of *Clerks* and *Casablanca*.

"I think it's different. I love *Mutual Appreciation* and *Funny Ha Ha*. They're so funny. I have a little bit more straightforward perverse kind of humour. It's more along the lines of *Clerks* or *Swingers*."

'I have a bit more straightforward perverse kind of humour'

Like a cinema vérité take on *Swingers*.

"Yeah, I think that's about right. I think that's a better model. But I really love those movies a lot. I know all the people making those films. But my style is different. Typically, like Andrew, he likes to use non-actors. They're very shy about the drama. Very, very low drama. We use total professional actors. It's completely scripted. We're shooting with a very distinct style, like an old-fashioned movie."

What really struck me about your film is that I was watching an LA I had never seen before. It brought to mind the Paris of Godard and Truffaut.

"Completely, 100 per cent. I mean, complete inspiration from those guys. Additionally, like the people in Austin – I mean, like Richard Linklater. Completely influenced by those guys. If you think

of the first French New Wave shooting on the streets, using those locations and using kind of fucked up questionable characters. Like why the hell aren't more people in LA doing that? I don't fucking get it! It's like it blew our mind. The locations are beautiful. They're all these beautiful, decrepit, interesting things to shoot. Yet I think everyone's in that mind frame that we shoot it at the studio, we shoot it on set."

You're from Texas, which is something explored in the film's fish out of water scenario. Are you now comfortable working in LA?

"Well now I've sort of settled in there. My life was like *Midnight Kiss*. I thought I was going to hate LA. I mean it was originally called *If LA Fell Into The Ocean I Wouldn't Miss It*. So that was going to be an, 'I hate LA' movie. But it ended up being kind of a love letter to it."

To me, your movie is equal parts vulgarity and heart.

"You take a movie like *Clerks* – it would be fun to use the willingness that *Clerks* has to be vulgar. In order to be funny, being honest. The way people kind of bullshit with one another. Mix that with *Swingers*. But *Swingers* is a little dated regarding the LA scene. You know, that's not what it's like anymore. It's completely different. And then I have a tendency to want to make it have those more real moments. So it just felt like the perfect thing to do. I feel like that's how your relationships are. You start out bullshitting."

In Search of a Midnight Kiss is showing at this year's Raindance Film Festival (see opposite page)



manufacturing dreams

Words: Everett True

The ones to watch at London's annual **Raindance film festival**

Summer Scars

Being Michael Madsen

dir Michael Mongillo, Mean Time, 88 mins

Smart, sarcastic documentary spoof centred round the *Reservoir Dogs* hard man actor, and his reactions to the actions of paparazzi photographer Billy Dant. Madsen, goaded beyond reason by Dant's celebrity stalking, decides to turn the tables upon Dant, and hires a documentary crew to unearth the dirt on his nemesis. Whether you enjoy it or not kind of hinges upon whether you're a fan of Madsen's laconic style, and also of 'reality' TV, but this is a surprisingly engaging and incisive film.

This Is Nollywood

dir Franco Sacchi, Centre Fort Digital Imaging, 56 mins

Despite street thugs demanding protection money, electricity failures, all-day prayer sessions that mean nothing else can take place while they happen, limited budgets (\$20,000) and time (nine days), leading actors who are making three films simultaneously and lack of technology, Nigerian film director Bond Emeruwa is determined to finish his full-length action feature on schedule. We follow him, though a fascinating, in-depth look at 'Nollywood', Nigeria's flourishing film industry, to unearth an entirely different portrait of Africa to the one usually portrayed over here. "I cannot tell the white man's story," explains Bond. "I don't know what his story is all about. He tells me his story in his movies. I want him to see my stories too." Humorous, deprecating and in places absurdly surreal; highly recommended.

Exhibit A

dir Dom Rotheroe, Bigger, 85 mins

The device is somewhat clichéd: a family tragedy, set in an everyday suburban Yorkshire street, told through the lens of the teenage daughter's video camera, filmed in a jumpy 'naturalistic' style (in reality, home movie footage is far more meandering and less edited than this). Dad doesn't get the raise he hoped for, so he can't pay his bills, so instead of telling his wife and family he slowly turns psycho – that's the basic premise. It's diverting enough – like Jude Law's *Final Cut* meets *The Blair Witch Project*, with some *You've Been Framed*-style content thrown in for additional irritation factor. But the device of having spoof news reports to trail the film is rather old hat, don't you think?

John Waters: This Filthy World

dir Jeff Garlin, Filthy World, 85 mins

Stand-up is weird. It's a weird format, I mean. Why would anyone pay money to watch a 'comedian' reaffirm your prejudices from on stage, when a conversation would be far preferable? But fuck it. Queen of camp, film director John Waters (*Cry Baby*, *Pink Flamingos*) is a total gem: he doesn't hold back from obscure references or bad language, taking us through his life and past and future projects (fisting,

Baltimore and mum and dad included) with barely a pause; delivered in typically droll, fake wide-eyed manner for over an hour-and-a-half of scintillating, pulsating and rather naughty banter.

Twenty To Life: The Life And Times Of John Sinclair

dir Steve Gebhardt, MVD, 96 mins

John Sinclair is a poet provocateur, an American counter-cultural warrior; former manager of The MC5; thrown inside for 10 years for possessing two marijuana joints; subject of a John Lennon song and 'freedom concert'; bearded and beatnik, reciting his tales of insurgence and revolt in declamatory fashion over some stunning contemporary blues and jazz outfits; the man who coined the "Rock'n'roll is a tool of the cultural revolution" slogan (a phrase he stopped believing in around 1973), now working for Amsterdam internet radio... former high priest of *High Times*, community organiser, chairman of the White Panthers... what's not to like? This fascinating, 16-years-in-the-making, documentary takes us through the considerable highs and lowdown lows of a life wonderfully misspent. Documentaries usually hinge upon the characters of those featured, and characters don't come much more fully defined than Mr Sinclair.

Summer Scars

dir Julian Richards, Prolific, 80 mins

Excellent coming-of-age movie, simply and superbly told: six 14-year-old Welsh kids bunk off school to play in the woods, accidentally running over (on a stolen motorbike) a mysterious drifter. Events rapidly spiral out of control as the drifter first befriends, and then controls, the gang. The children are forced to make a series of unsavoury yet life-changing choices, forced upon them by the manipulative grown-up (played with consummate creepiness by Kevin Howarth. Imagine *Stand By Me*, with some horror thrown in: really, really fine.

Manufacturing Dissent: Uncovering Michael Moore

dir Rick Caine/Debbie Melnyk, Liberation, 97 mins

Couple of would-be radical documentary-makers decide to trail counter-culture hero Michael Moore on the anti-Bush election trail during the making of one of Moore's own documentaries, and discover that he isn't perfect after all. Um... and your point is what, exactly?

Raindance offers a selection of independent cinema from across the globe, with the emphasis on emerging talent. This year's jury includes ex-Clash guitarist Mick Jones, Iggy Pop and The Independent film critic Anthony Quinn. The festival runs from 25 September to 7 October in London's West End. www.raindance.co.uk



No Restraint

dir Matthew Barney, Agnès B, 72 mins

Matthew Barney owes a lot of his career to Vaseline. The artist was discovered by New York gallery-owner Barbara Gladstone in the early Nineties, shortly after graduating from Yale – she saw his use of petroleum jelly as sculptural material, turned into an other-worldly, ice-cold structure in his basement. Since then, Barney's use of unconventional, bodily fluid-referencing media has become a regular signature in his work, including the acclaimed *Cremaster Cycle*. It also informs his latest production, *Drawing Restraint 9*.

No Restraint, an accompanying piece filmed in November 2004, is both a 'making of' documentary about Barney's *DR9* and an insight into the mind of one of contemporary art's enigmatic creatives.

For *DR9*, Barney set sail aboard Japanese whaling vessel the *Nisshin Maru*, complete with camera crew and partner Björk in tow, in order to film a fantastical, oblique love story. Unfolding on the whaling ship, it offers both an imaginative play on Japanese culture and a mysterious tale of ancient ritual, conjuring up a world somewhere between Narnia, *Pan's Labyrinth* and a mariner's folk tale, all set against the industrial backdrop of Japan's whale trade. With Barney and Björk playing the role of The Guests on board the ship, the narrative explores themes of disintegration and rebirth, with their characters finally succumbing to the sea, and metamorphosing into whale-like creatures.

As for the Vaseline – this time it involved Barney carrying 45,000 lb of petroleum jelly on board the whaling ship, and pouring it into a giant metal mould, which made a focal point for the film. Once out on the cold ocean, the vat of jelly set, the metal frame was removed, leaving a vast, whale-shaped blancmange, which was then used on set, both in a symbolic whole, and as part of the more abstract landscape.

Drawing Restraint 9 builds on Barney's desire to make work within a set of parameters, and whereas previously this might have entailed the 'restraint' of his own physical action, for *DR9*, the stakes seem higher. The 'restraint' is found in the massive ambition of the project, coupled with the restrictive environment – the boat – within which it is created.

If all this sounds a bit impenetrable and esoteric, *No Restraint* offers an intriguing, humanising way in to Barney's work, and acts as an effective foil to the intense, sometimes perplexing, experience of watching his own creations. Whilst his works are surreal and enigmatic, they also offer some of the most visually staggering filmic sequences conceived in experimental filmmaking, and seduce and perplex in their narrative mystery.

In *No Restraint*, we are also offered an insight into the production process of Barney's creations; the special effects and prosthetic costumes, the clash of cultures when American artist meets Japanese fisherman, Björk's music-making process. That Barney is in fact a likeable, humorous individual, previously a professional sportsman and fashion model, with a childhood based in Idaho, all contribute to this surprisingly warm portrait of an artist.

Matthew Barney exhibits at the Serpentine Gallery until 11 November

Emma Pettit

film & dvd

Lynch

Words: Stewart Gardiner

It started with a comedy fishing show, a grant having been received to shoot a pilot. A producer's friend tells him this over lunch and the producer thinks that if a comedy fishing show can receive a grant then so should a documentary on David Lynch.

Lynch is the mesmerising result of this thinking, allowing the viewer unprecedented access into the artist's world. I spoke with director blackANDwhite via email.

Your identity is shrouded in mystery – I even heard a rumour that Lynch directed the film himself.

"The mystery surrounding the director is kind of surprising to us. We never expected that people would give so much attention to a person's name. But I guess it's understandable that with a project surrounding David anything unexplained would need to be explained. I can say that the film was definitely not directed by David and that the director is a real person."

What was it like watching Lynch at work?

"It was incredible to see David go through the process of creating *Inland Empire*. He would come up with pieces to the puzzle not knowing for sure how they related to the puzzle as a whole. And then he would go shoot them, confident that they would fit together in the end."

Lynch has a surprisingly commanding presence on set.

"David is an incredibly warm man on, and off, the set. His crew loves working with him and he quite often works with the same people. He is a director though and decisions need to be made. Sometimes he has to be very direct and that might seem a bit harsh to some. But it is in the moment thing and once the moment has passed the mood on the set gets light again. People love working with David."

You shot over 700 hours of footage.

"*Lynch* was, and is, a project that cannot be defined by one film or DVD. We always saw it as a multi-part series in which the DVD extras as well as the films would give the complete picture of who David is. In the series there are three films: *Lynch*, *Lynch 2* and *Lynch 3*."



Les Chansons D'Amour

at the movies 1 (Edinburgh special)

Words: Stewart Gardiner

Plan B dives headlong into the Edinburgh film festival: a veritable pit of hermaphrodites, snakes, cardiac arrests and skateboarders

Les Chansons D'Amour dir Christophe Honoré, Alma, 100 mins
XXY dir Lucia Puenzo, Historias Cinematograficas Cinemania, 86 mins
Phantom Love dir Nina Menkes, KNR, 86 mins
Paranoid Park dir Gus Van Sant, MK2, 90 mins

There's a snake in the corridor. I cannot be sure if it's real or not, but it's there nonetheless. I'm thinking it may just be fallout from the 61st Edinburgh international film festival. Immersing oneself in films may be my natural state, but it doesn't translate well in the real world. I've been having serious difficulties readjusting post-festival, despite my efforts to watch as many Ingmar Bergman and Gus Van Sant pictures as possible in the comfort of my own home. But the festival will not leave me alone, its indelible images firing up within my mind's eye.

Sex and death prove to be enduring subjects for

beautifully assured debut **XXY**. Alex is 15 years old and trying to find her place in the world, like any teenager. Where this differs from typical adolescence is in the fact that Alex is a hermaphrodite. Questions of identity are explored with unflinching subtlety as the narrative unravels at a leisurely, natural pace. At one point the mother cuts herself while chopping up a carrot, which could so easily have been heavy-handed symbolism. But here it merely

strengthens the *mise-en-scène*, the notion of confusion bleeding through the story.

Speaking of symbolism, here's that snake again. It's still in the corridor, but now I'm able to locate it in its rightful cinematic surroundings: Nina Menkes' **Phantom Love**. The film opens with four minutes or so of wordless sex. There is nothing gratuitous, in fact there's nothing at all in the way of basic exposition. It eschews cause and effect for an accumulation of images, repetition of theme and setting. David Lynch is a good enough point of reference – the black and white photography and non-linearity recalling *Eraserhead* – but *Last Year In Marienbad* probably gets us closer. Alain Resnais' classic study of memory as it relates to an affair may have something to do with the sexual trauma that takes place in *Phantom Love*, but it's deliciously difficult to find your bearings in the film, so I could be very wrong indeed.

Time has been thrown out of sync in **Paranoid Park**, wherein Gus Van Sant once again dissects the teenage world through the introduction of death. A tragedy permeates the life of teenage skater Alex – the killing of a security guard near the titular skate park – and he is telling us this story as a means of working through the turmoil. The slo-mo, grainy shots of skateboarding are mesmerising, the world viewed through the mind of our protagonist a fractured, dislocated place. Shared aesthetics aside, this is no retread of *Elephant*, but rather a director at the height of his powers: elliptical, commanding and dreamlike. There was also a rare screening of the director's debut feature, *Mala Noche*, which showcases a number of Van Sant's devices and themes in their formative state. Taken together, Gus Van Sant is revealed as an auteur of abiding interest, an artist unafraid to interpret the world as he sees it. His images have the fragility of dreams, but the longevity of life's moments lived.

The fragility of dreams, but the longevity of life's moments lived

the cinema, with the former dominating my picks of the festival. I certainly didn't go looking for it, although perhaps I protest too much. It crept up on me as I was watching **Les Chansons D'Amour**, the latest picture from *Dans Paris* director Christophe Honoré. The set-up is the classic *ménage à trios* – but with songs! – and is initially so light and airy that I half expect to see Doris Day at any moment. Yet it soon darkens considerably with the entirely unexpected death of one of the women – her cardiac arrest a literal broken heart. This throws the characters into turmoil, with Louis Garrel's Ismael casually exploring bodily contacts, giving up on life in an almost idle fashion.

Failing in your life is one thing, but what if starting out is the real issue? Argentinean director Lucia Puenzo explores such a position in her



Lynch



The Monastery: Mr Vig And The Nun

at the movies 2 (Edinburgh special)

Words: Euan Andrews

Edinburgh part two – but unlike most sequels, this round-up's a winner, with a cast of film obsessives, grand old Danish eccentrics and teenage metal fans

Comrades In Dreams dir Uli Gaulke, Flying Moon, 100 mins
Protagonist dir Jessica Yu, Diorama, 90 mins
Billy The Kid dir Jennifer Venditti, Eight, 84 mins
The Monastery: Mr Vig And The Nun dir Pernille Rose Grønkvjaer, DR TV, 84 mins
The Wake Of A Deadad dir Andrew Kötting, Lux, 62 mins

Monday evening at an EIFF masterclass, cinematographer Christopher Doyle is expounding at length his cinematic theories and methods. At one point, he tells the audience how they, he, I need this. This communal coming together, to sit with intimate strangers in dark chambers encountering shared visions on the cinema screen. It's a concept directly addressed in Uli Gaulke's **Comrades In Dreams**, meeting four globally disparate cinema proprietors in Wyoming, rural India, Africa's Burkina Faso and North Korea. The characters' differences are evident, yet they share a passion for the uniting powers of a film, whether it is the lonely middle-aged woman running Wyoming's The Flick as a centre for community, or the lovely Korean, Hang Yong-sil, weeping for the revolution while showing propaganda disguised as pedestrian drama.

Four disconnected people also populate **Protagonist**, Jessica Yu's documentary thesis on Euripidean dramatic structure and how this can be mirrored in the narrative arc of characters so determined in pursuit of their righteous goal that they lose all sense of perspective. *Protagonist* shows the simple power of talking heads looking back over their lives.

Billy The Kid is a guy whose life is all in front of him. He's 15, likes karate, heavy metal and slasher movies. He also has issues. He comes from a broken home, struggles with his anger and is an outsider.

being a teenager, *Billy The Kid* is like a great Jonathan Richman song come to life.

It's hard to imagine Mr Vig, eponymous focus of Pernille Rose Grønkvjaer's **The Monastery: Mr Vig And The Nun**, ever being a teenager. A grand old Danish eccentric in his eighties, he has yearned for decades to have a religious retreat created on his land. Finally, the Moscow Patriarchate despatches a group of nuns to begin preparations, headed by the determined Sister Amvrosya. A self-imposed recluse all his days, with scant knowledge of the 'ways of women', nuns or otherwise, Mr Vig initially clashes with the spiky Sister Amvrosya. Somehow, though, some shared belief between them creates a kind of bond as they work together to realise Mr Vig's lifelong dream. As seasons pass, a great sense of time and place within a world apart is created, populated by two difficult but endearing characters.

Finally, very finally, **In The Wake Of A Deadad** is a series of 63 short vignettes following Andrew Kötting, director of *Gallivant* and *This Filthy Earth*, as he escorts a large inflatable effigy of his dead father around numerous locations of significance to either or both of them. Massively irreverent and funny, yet somehow sad in its occasional depiction of the Deadad as a distant unmalleable weight, it's a fitting tribute to the contradicting feelings evoked by the recently dead and the towering presence of the father figure through life and death.

This exceptional *verite*-style film follows Billy around his hometown in Maine, focusing in particular on his wooing of 16-year old Heather. A brilliant character portrait, as well as one of the best films ever on the sheer hell of



I'm A Cyborg, But That's OK
 dir Park Chan-Wook, Tartan, 105 mins
Breath
 dir Kim Ki-duk, Tartan, 84 mins

You can't help who you're attracted to, my friend says. It's a skin thing, she says. New films from two of South Korea's most notorious filmmakers both explore this helpless desire thing with a pair of strange relationships. Park Chan-Wook is best known for his 'vengeance' trilogy, *Oldboy* in particular. He has said *I'm A Cyborg, But That's OK* is his attempt to make a film his children could see. I'd love to know what they make of it. Following instructions from her factory work broadcast, Young-goon attempts suicide in an attempt to recharge her fading circuits. Winding up in a truly deranged mental hospital, she refuses to eat and instead licks batteries and wanders the corridors wearing her grandmother's false teeth while talking to vending machines. She begs fellow inmate Il-Sun to steal her sympathy so she can follow her chosen path as a guilt-free inhuman assassin. Il-Sun falls for her and a rather sweet affair follows in which he tries to persuade the wasting away Young-goon that food won't destroy her cyborg core. Although mainly devoid of his usual ultra-violence, *I'm A Cyborg*... is still breathtakingly extreme with its hyper-real visuals and truly out-there plotting.

More subdued on surface is Kim Ki-duk's *Breath*, in which jilted housewife Yeon becomes sexually obsessed with death row murderer Jang Jin. She visits him several times in prison, following his recent suicide attempt, and tells him intimate secrets, of her desire for suffocation. With each visit she decorates his cell with a season's colours and sings happy songs. With each visit, they are allowed to get closer and closer. *Breath* becomes a disturbing scrutiny of self-annihilation, of cutting out the parts you hate, with a truly exceptional performance from Zia as Yeon.

Euan Andrews

The rockin' revenge of...lou reed

Words: Daniel Spicer

Photography: Lou Reed

On the release of a new avant-garde classical version of his infamous feedback masterpiece, *Metal Machine Music*, **Lou Reed** sets the record straight

OK, so clearly you have memorised (at least) one piece of ridiculous hyperbole regarding *Metal Machine Music*. Please quote your favourite here.

"I try not to look at it, unless my mother sends it to me saying, 'Oh, they love this thing'. There's better things to do in life than read about yourself. I don't listen to my own stuff because I'd rather listen to new stuff and I certainly don't want to read about myself."

What is the biggest misconception about *Metal Machine Music*?

"That I did it to get out of a recording contract. I wouldn't put something out that people would buy so I could get out of a contract. It's so disgusting for someone to say that, it's

'It's all about energy and purity of heart and ability'

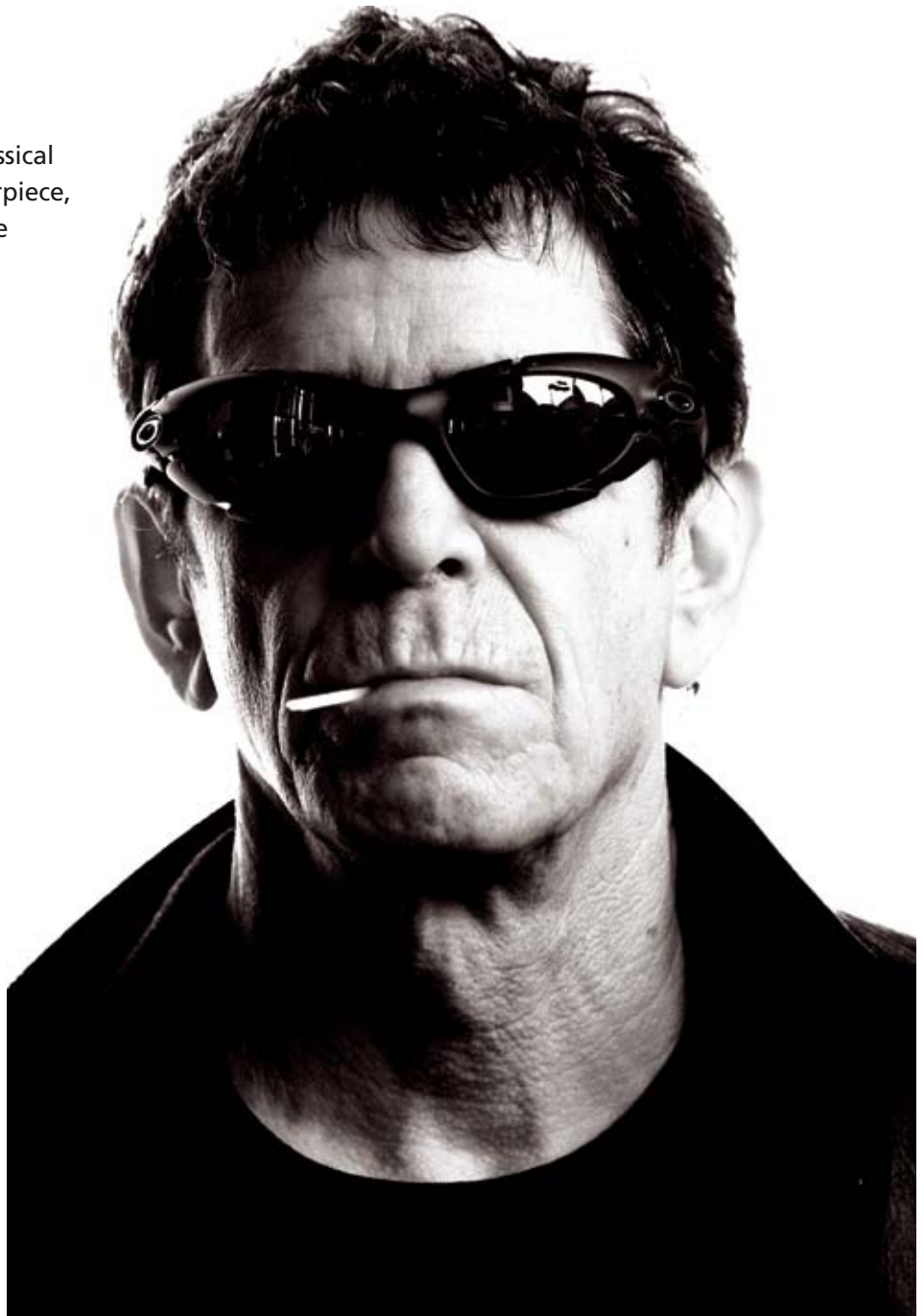
not worth answering."

The most over-used adjective(s) about *Metal Machine Music*?

"I haven't kept track. I'm not interested in critical response. It's not made for critics. It's made for people who like rock. There were other people making different kinds of electronic records and they were approaching it from different points of view. I was approaching it from a rock'n'roll guitarist's point of view. Since that's what I am, if I'm anything."

What concept or detail about *Metal Machine Music* is always missed?

"It's really very, very aggressive sonic rock. It's trying to really get through the speaker. It should really lift you up. It's supposed to give you a real... you know how, like in hip hop and rap, if you go to a live concert, the way that bottom end just hits the lower half of you so hard? It's the loudest single thing there. If you're listening on ear-buds you're going to miss the physicality. For me, these things are physical. There's a physical component of it where your body should actually feel this.



"Now, in r'n'b and all that stuff, at the very least you're dancing and tapping your foot. In hip hop they come at you with that bass, trying to blow the bottom end off you. *Metal Machine* is trying to take you on one big guitar ride. wanted to put together something that you hadn't heard before, that I hadn't heard before, where you're not trapped by the tempo, trapped by the key."

What was the most heinous lie you ever told about *Metal Machine Music* in an interview?

"I've never really been asked much about it because it was banned in three weeks."

What do you do when a band you don't like cite *Metal Machine Music* as an influence?

"I can never be aware of everything or everyone, but every once in a while I run into younger musicians and they'll tell me, 'I was listening to *Metal Machine* so I'm doing this... all I do is play pedals. I don't do melody, I'm playing pedals and processing this and processing that'. And... they're fantastic.

"I mean, these guys are musicians. They're not just flailing about. But even if you were just flailing about, there's nothing wrong with

that. It's all about energy and purity of heart and ability."

Do you ever Google yourself?

"There are people who do that. I like to type in 'Leica M8'. It's a camera I'm incredibly in love with."

What's the favourite of your record covers, and why?

"All the Warhol covers were astonishing. Just all of them. Every single one. The [Velvet Underground] banana is still the most astonishing cover I think I've ever seen in my life, bar none. What do you do when you're around someone that smart?"

What does it, y'know, say about you?

"Of course, people say 'What does a banana have to do with your album?' What possible answer is there to that? Well, the answer is, 'Peel the skin off and look what's underneath. Now tell me what you think.'"

Lou Reed *Metal Machine Music* performed by Zeitkratzer is released on CD/DVD by Asphodel Records. For further information visit www.zeitkratzer.de and www.loureed.com

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Only Connect

'Challenging, genre-trashing, promiscuous' Time Out



Patti Smith



Leonard Cohen and Philip Glass



Philip Glass



Still from Exodus © Penny Woolcock



Album cover, *Silence, Night & Dreams*
Zbigniew Preisner

Fri 19 – Sun 21 Oct

Glassworks

A weekend of special concerts to mark Philip Glass' 70th birthday.

Fri 19 Oct 7.30pm LSO St Luke's **Returns only**

Philip Glass & Patti Smith The Poet Speaks

Philip Glass and Patti Smith share the stage for a rare and intimate evening of piano and poetry inspired by their mutual passion for the work of seminal beat poet Allen Ginsberg.

Sat 20 Oct 7.30pm **Returns only**

Book of Longing

A special evening of newly commissioned work based on the poetry of Leonard Cohen. Philip Glass sets Cohen's deeply personal and provocative words to a new score, performing with a new ensemble of singers and musicians.

Pre-Concert talk 6pm

Philip Glass and Leonard Cohen in conversation.

Sun 21 Oct 4.30pm

Music in 12 Parts

Music in 12 Parts is a four-hour music marathon, composed for the Philip Glass Ensemble, considered to be a seminal composition that defined minimalist music in the 20th Century. This is the first time that it has been performed in London in its entirety since 1992.

Box Office 0845 120 7541

www.barbican.org.uk/contemporary

Sun 28 Oct 7.30pm

Plague Songs

Featuring performances by Imogen Heap, Kenny Anderson (King Creosote), Sandy Dillon and The Handsome Family with a band including David Coulter, Leo Abrahams, Thomas Bloc and Roger Eno. In 2006, Artangel commissioned some of the world's leading artists to write and record songs inspired by the biblical plagues, these ten songs were released on the album *Plague Songs*. For this event, the Barbican brings together many of the artists who recorded on the album and invite others to write and perform new plagues.

Sun 2 Dec 7.30pm

Zbigniew Preisner Silence, Night & Dreams

With the LSO & special guest Teresa Salgueiro

Celebrated Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner presents the UK premiere of his new project, a large scale work for orchestra, chorus and soloists, based on the texts from the *Book of Job*. Best known for his evocative scores for Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours: Blue, White, Red*, Preisner conducts the LSO and a dozen soloists including Teresa Salgueiro, lead singer of Portuguese band Madredeus.

Media Partner



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Band of Horses

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